



Something Wicked Cometh

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Summary:

His mother had always told him that he never needed the outside world to perfect his craft. All he needed was her and his coven, but on his sixteenth year, Eddie finally is getting what he always wanted: To go to high school. (Eddie Witch AU)

1. Chapter One: The New Kid

Author's Note:

DISCLAIMER: Though most of the spells and practices used in this story are real, this story in no way reflects the actual life and going ons of actual witches, wiccans and their covens.

A huge thank you to [Mrs_Vh](#) for betaing this for me. Any mistakes are mine.

In his dreams his limbs went missing.

Not all at once.

First, his right arm would slowly start disappear, followed by his left leg and then his left arm. By the time his right leg was gone, he could feel the rest of his body slowly start to fade into darkness while bright gold eyes, like Spanish doubloons, watched him.

It never hurt. No never.

He could just feel himself float away as he heard the soft soothing voice call his name and sing to him.

WITCH ☐ Ø Y

WITCH ☐ ØY

GIVE MEYØUR NAME

WITCH ☐ ØY

WITCH ☐ ØY

LET ME SET YOUR WORLD AFLAME

WITCH ☐ ØY

ØH

WITCH ☐ ØY

LET ME LAY MY CLAIM

Eddie's eyes fluttered open at the sound of his alarm going off and he stared over at his old dresser for a minute as he tried to get his head to focus and out of the dream fog. With a sigh he rubbed his hands over his face, confused as to why his alarm was going off so early when he suddenly remembered.

"Oh my god!" Eddie gasped as he sat up straight in bed, a wide grin coming to his face, pushing his comforter and sheets off of him and scrambled to get up. "School! I have actual school."

It had taken ten long years of asking and pleading with his mother. Every birthday always asking to go to school like the normal kids he would see walk past his house in the morning, only to be tutted at and told to go practice. Finally, on his fourteenth birthday, his mother had told him that if by the time he turned sixteen and still wished to go she would allow it. She had probably hoped that the need to go out and see other kids his age would have died out. Hoped that he would look for more important things like finding his place in the coven and what gift he would offer to them, but it hadn't and in August Edward Franklin Kaspbrak had been registered for high school.

He slammed his hand down on his alarm, silencing it as he moved to look over the clothes he had picked out last night for his first day of

school. Blue polo with khaki shorts had seemed like a good choice last night, but now he was rethinking it and wondered if he had anything else that would work a little better.

Mike had told him just to be himself, besides all the witch stuff so they didn't get in trouble, but Eddie didn't really know how to be himself without being a witch.

It was all Eddie had ever known.

He ran his hands through his curling hair, happy that it was finally growing out after his last haircut his mom had given him and pulled out one of the old button downs that had been his dad's. Eddie smiled slightly at the worn frayed blue cuffs and brought it up to his face to take a deep breath.

It only smelled of mothballs now, but Eddie kept his eyes closed as he whispered a soft prayer in hopes his father's spirit would hear it. He laid it out over the khaki shorts, grabbing the polo and tossing it back into his closet in a ball before moving to the bathroom.

By the time he was running down the steps to slide into the kitchen it was already six-thirty and he rushed to start making himself a lunch. He felt really cool right then. He was an actual teenager, making his own lunch that he had gone out and bought ingredients for on his own yesterday. Eddie couldn't stop his grin as he smeared mayo on the wheat bread before layering it with turkey and cheese, sliding it into one of those plastic baggies he had seen a commercial for on TV.

He had just moved to grab an apple when he heard his mother's voice call him from the living room. He pushed down the fear that she would let him come this far only to take it away, tossing the apple in his bag as he moved into the living room clutching his lunch tightly.

"Yeah, Mama?"

Sonia Kaspbrak had once been a pretty witch. Her hair had been the same color as Eddie's with the exact curls his hair had, her eyes a deep hazel and a strong jaw. From the pictures on the wall from before Eddie had been born, one would have never guessed that the same smiling woman in the sunny yellow dress with dark ringlets

that framed her face would be the same one who sat in her recliner in her nightgown. Hair greasy grey and permanently in curlers, her thick reading glasses pushed high up on her nose and an unhappy frown on her face as she turned her eyes from the TV to her son.

She watched him for a moment, a sweat starting to break out under Eddie's armpits the longer she stared and said nothing. He fidgeted with the rolled cuff of his dad's shirt, the thing a little too big on him and he hoped she wouldn't make him change.

Finally, she sighed and turned to the small folding table beside her, waving him over with a thick arm. "Come on, Eddie-bear. Let me do your protection spell."

Eddie glanced at the clock in the kitchen and hesitated. "Mama, I don't really have that much time."

Soft eyes turned hard, and she glared as her lips pursed meanly. "Oh? Is that so? I seem to remember the deal was you get to go to school as long as you follow my rules. Was that not the deal?"

Shit. He should have never opened his big mouth. "Yes, Mama. I'm sorry."

"And now, it's the first day and you're already giving me trouble? It's a protection spell, Eddie. It's so I can know you are safe while out there around who knows what. Is that really so much to ask?"

Guilt. That's what she wanted him to feel, but he had long ago learned how she liked to play this game and he decided he wasn't going to be a game piece anymore. But he still had to toe the line if he wanted to get out on time. "No, Mama."

His mother snorted a little and waved him over again, which he came willingly if it let him get out of the house quicker. He stood next to her small folding table, the small pieces of amber, turquoise and bloodstone laid out along with her incense burner and the photo of him from last year.

"Did you wash the stones already, Mama?"

He cringed a little when she fixed him with a glare, clicking her

tongue loudly as she reached over to light the tip of the incense and motioned for him to blow it out which he obeyed. She picked up the black sharpie that was there as well and wrote over his face in her scrawling script “Eddie is safe” across his face on the photograph.

“You took your shower?”

Eddie nodded, his skin still smelling of sandalwood and rosemary while his muscles were lax from the epsom salt. His mother took this as enough of an answer and closed her eyes after handing Eddie the small bottle of rosemary oil and he took it and dotted the corners of the photo as she muttered under her breath. When she finished, Eddie took his photo and folded it up small, sliding it into the small white silk pouch she handed him while she rubbed oil on the stones and then slipped them in with the photo. Together they tied a black ribbon around the bag, knotting it eight times and then his mother reached for her bottle of salt water beside her chair which left Eddie to do the incantation.

“Anything that could cause harm

is now repelled by this magick charm.”

He watched his mother sprinkle the small pouch with the saltwater before motioning for him to hold it over the smoke. He waited until she gave the okay and then slid the small pouch into his pocket, giving her a hopeful smile that they were done.

“Can I go now?”

She pursed her lips a little, giving his appearance another once over. “Are you sure this is what you want? You don’t even know anybody there, Eddie.”

“Mike said he’d introduce me to his friends once he was done on the farm today.”

Eddie frowned when his mother’s expression turned sour and he felt himself grow defensive for his childhood friend. Mike and Eddie had been one of the few children born into the coven, the Hanlons being one of the nicest people Eddie had ever met and still liked to visit

even if they had been exiled from the Coven years ago over a matter no one liked to talk about. He had tried asking his mother about it, but like Mike's parents, she refused to give any real answers.

"I don't like you being around that Hanlon boy, Eddie. I wish you'd make friends with the other boys and girls in the coven, like Bower's boy."

Eddie shook his head quickly, his stomach feeling sick at the idea of even trying to be friends with that giant asshole. It was already enough that he had to see Henry at the coven as well as at school, spending any more time than that around him would make Eddie want to jump off a cliff.

"Mike is my friend, Mama. No matter what anyone says about the Hanlons, he always will be."

He squared his shoulders and met her glare with his own, being in his teens giving him a little more courage these days when it came to dealing with her. Luckily, she folded first and shook her head, leaning back in her chair with a huff as he eyes slid back to the TV behind Eddie.

"And you know not to say anything about us of the Coven to the other kids?"

Eddie nodded, but when he saw that she was still looking at the television, he voiced his answer. "Yes, Mama. I know."

"Why?"

He resisted rolling his eyes. "Because our kind are misunderstood and could easily be tracked by hunters if we aren't careful."

"Mmmm. Good. You took your medicine?"

Eddie sighed and shook his head, thinking about the sickly-sweet taste of the sticky dark honey mixed with ivy.

"I really don't think I need it. I haven't coughed at all this morning."

"That's because you took it yesterday, but it's effects will wear off, so

you need to take it again now, Eddie.” He hesitated and she scowled, her attention on him again. “Do I have to force you to take it like when you were little again? Because I will, Edward.”

It wasn’t worth the hassle. “No, Mama.”

He quickly moved back into the kitchen and grabbed the dark glass bottle and a silver spoon from the drawer. He poured the thick dark liquid into the spoon, gagging a little at how goopy it was before taking a deep breath and putting it in his mouth.

He swallowed quickly and rushed to take a drink from the tap to wash the taste out, then ran to shove his lunch bag in his father’s old leather messenger bag. He hitched it up over his shoulder, going over to give his mother a kiss before running out the door, grinning as the warm late August air hit his face.

Today was going to be amazing.

Eddie’s leg jiggled as he waited for the lady who called herself Ms. Brill. Ms. Brill had said she was his counselor and would therefore be helping him through this big change in his life, which honestly made him feel a little better. She could hear him talking to a man in her office and Eddie hunched his shoulders every time he heard his name said from the other room. When the door opened, the man walked out, not even look at Eddie as he left the lobby to disappear into the hallway.

“Eddie?”

Eddie turned to look in the direction of the voice, surprised to find such a young-looking woman smiling gently at him with warm brown eyes. He nodded and she motioned him inside, shutting the door behind him and asked for him to sit. He sat down in the spare chair with an ungrateful flop and shook his head when she offered him a cup of water or some candy from a jar. He watched her set a file in

front of her, then folded her hands on top of it and smiled at him.

He tried to smile back.

“So, Eddie. Let me be the first to welcome you to Derry High. I know this is your first time in public school, so I wanted to make sure you had everything you needed before we push you out there.”

Eddie laughed a little awkwardly when she did, and he shifted so he could face her a little better.

“Now, I have a few things I need to go over with you first, is that alright?” When Eddie nodded, she smiled and moved to open the thing folder. “Now, when you took your placement test last month, you tested very high in math and English which is really great. We could probably put you in some senior classes if you wanted if everything goes well this first semester.”

Eddie felt a swell of pride at the idea that he was already doing well in this new place. He silently thanked his mother for drilling him on math and making him write out each spell so many times before casting it. Turned out it helped in the long run.

“Unfortunately,” Ms. Brill but her bottom lip and Eddie felt his spirits sink. “When it came to subjects like science and history, your scores were a little lower than we had hoped.”

“A little?”

Ms. Brill made a shrugging motion and then shook her head, closing the file with a soft huff. “But that’s okay. If you’re willing, I was hoping you would be interested in tutoring. We have a lot of really good kids available and I think we should try that before moving you back into the younger classes. Unless you would be more comfortable there. This is up to you.”

Eddie picked at the hangnail on his left thumb, wondering how hard it would be to figure out what those classes were talking about when he couldn't remember his mother ever teaching him anything like that. But if he never tried how would he know he could or couldn't do it?

“I’d like to try the tutor first, if that’s okay?”

“Of course.” Ms. Brill smiled and leaned over to write something on a small brightly colored notepad on her desk. “I’ll have someone assigned to you by the end of today and if you want you can meet them after school. That alright?”

Eddie nodded a little, hoisting his bag further into his lap so he could hold it tightly to himself. He tried not to let it bug him, that he hadn’t done well in those subjects which now meant he had to play catch up, the speed of his heart picking up and he had to take a calming breath.

He could do this. Every kid almost everywhere did this, so he could too.

He hoped.

He waited as she typed something into her computer, her desktop far nicer than anything he had ever seen. It was way better than his dad’s old IBM 5150, which Eddie had only just recently learned how to turn on after sneaking down to the basement at night.

“Alright. I’ll print out your class list for you and I got someone to show you around, so you aren’t just on your own for the first day.” Ms. Brill still had her smile on, and Eddie wondered if all counselors were this happy and a helpful, but he nodded as they waited for her printer to finish.

Just after she handed it to him, they both heard a soft knock at the door, Ms. Brill telling whoever it was to come on in. A boy around Eddie’s age stepped in, sandy colored blonde hair with a handsome face and smiled warmly at the both of them.

“Eddie,” Ms. Brill said, scooting her roller chair over so she was next to the other boy. “This is Ben, Ben Hanscom. Ben, this is Eddie Kaspbrak. He’ll be the one showing you around today, Eddie.”

“It’s nice to meet you.” Ben held out his hand, Eddie quick to reach out and shake it so he didn’t seem rude. Ben’s hand was warm and calloused, shaking with just the right amount of pressure that showed

he wasn't trying to threaten Eddie with his strength, but it was there.

"It's nice to meet you too."

Ms. Brill clapped her hands together once, causing both boys to drop the handshake to look at her and Eddie stood up from his seat so Ben wouldn't be the only one standing anymore. Eddie's counselor moved herself and her chair back to where it had been, crossing her legs as she smiled at the two.

"Alright. Well, Ben you better start the tour, and no having it last more than two hours. You might have a free period, but let's get Eddie in his classes as fast as we can."

"Yes, ma'am."

Eddie followed Ben out the door, one last wave at his counselor before it shut and the two of them walked down the empty hall. Eddie fiddled with the strap of his messenger bag, unsure what to say or how to start a conversation and was relieved when Ben started it for him.

"So, you know Mike?"

Eddie almost wanted to cry from joy. Mike he could talk about.

"Yeah! You know him too?"

Ben smiled and nodded his head a few times as he led Eddie up a flight of stairs. This new hallway was packed with lockers all the way down and Ben stopped at one, it taking Eddie a moment before he realized this was supposed to be his.

Locker 176.

Wow. His own locker.

He fished the small piece of paper out of his pocket that the secretary had given him when she'd told him his number and glanced at the three-digit combo before trying it out. After four tries he finally got it open, weakly glaring when Ben congratulated him on it and looking to see what books he needed for what classes before shoving a few in

his locker and feeling lighter.

“Anyway,” Ben started again, surprising Eddie a little bit. “Yeah, Mike is great. When I first came here, I was surprised a kid who had never set foot in public school had so many public-school friends, but after meeting him it wasn’t that big of a surprise.”

Eddie couldn’t help the grin on his face at Ben’s words about his friend, nodding enthusiastically in agreement. “Right? It’s cause his mom let him sign up for a bunch of park district stuff as long as he could still do his farm work.”

Ben nodded and he pointed over to a few doors, explaining that the library was through there along with the computer lab. He said something about a laptop checkout station, but Eddie wasn’t sure what that was, so he just nodded along.

“So, you’re homeschooled too? You and Mike do it together?”

Eddie bit his lip, wondering how best to explain why he wasn’t really allowed to see Mike all that much anymore, but in the end just shook his head. “No, not really. We kind of did when we were younger, but not so much anymore.”

He was glad when Ben didn’t ask any more on that, blowing out a soft breath when he was shown the main gym and then the lunch room. He handed Ben his schedule when he asked, Ben’s smile turning bright when he handed it back.

“Hey, you have the same lunch period as me and some of my friends.”

“Ah?”

He must not have hidden his confusion well because Ben laughed and shook his head. “They are Mike’s friends as well.”

“Oh! Ah. Sorry!” Eddie’s cheeks went red and he hoped he hadn’t offended Ben by making it seem like if they were only Ben’s friends, he didn’t want anything to do with them. “I didn’t mean it like that, I- I actually don’t know what I meant by that. I’m sorry.”

Ben only laughed again and reached out to knock his fist lightly against Eddie's shoulder. "It's no problem, dude. But if you really feel bad, make it up to me by sitting with us today?"

He could hear Mike's voice in the back of his head telling him to do it and he smiled widely as he adjusted his bag's strap on his shoulder. "Y-Yeah. Yeah! No, I mean, yeah. I'd really like that."

"Cool. We usually sit at the table along the back wall. You'll see us when you walk in. Stan and Richie are always both there before anyone, so just look for two guys with really curly hair."

Eddie nodded, remembering curls.

"And just sit down, tell them I told you to and that your Mike's friend. Don't worry, they're nice guys." Ben seemed to pause for a minute, shrugging his shoulders. "They are both nice, but Stan can be a little bit prickly when you first meet him, but don't worry, Richie will be nice enough for the both of them."

Eddie nodded again, his stomach clenching a little in nerves about meeting Ben's other friends. Especially this prickly Stan guy, but if they were friendly like Ben then surely, they couldn't be that bad. Right?

"Alright. Thanks, for all of this."

Ben laughed and shook his head. "You make it sound like it was a lot of work. I know what it's like to be the new kid, so it's no problem."

Ben continued to show Eddie around the school, letting him know the ins and the outs of the place and where to steer clear from at certain times. Eddie was disappointed when they had to part ways and he had to go to his first class, waving at Ben as the other boy disappeared down the hall. Eddie pulled his schedule out of his bag, finding his third period class and started making his way to the classroom where it said it was.

First official class. Chemistry.

He had this.

He did not have this.

Eddie slumped down against the wall in one of the empty hallways and buried his face in his hands, refusing to let any tears escape no matter how frustrated he was.

Chemistry had been a joke.

Nobody had wanted to be his partner, laughing behind their hands when he had introduced himself to the class and admitted to not being able to check the class homework list because he didn't have the internet. He heard things whispered, that he was weird, that he smelled like the stoner shop in the mall, that the flowers etched into his bag were gay or the ring on his right ring finger looked dumb.

He took a few deep breaths, hating the way he felt his chest start to tighten as he tried to remain calm. The last thing he needed was to have an asthma attack in the middle of the hallway and he dug through his bag quickly to pull out the little silver vile. He closed his eyes and pressed the vile to his lips and then to his forehead before opening it up and dripping a few drops into his mouth. The taste of lavender and clove mixed with basil always threw him and he screwed his face up as he tried to focus on breathing, letting the potion do its work to help.

When he felt himself start to relax a little, he slipped the vile back in his bag and reached into his shirt to grip the crystals hanging from the cord around his neck tightly. He felt foolish now for thinking he didn't need these, his mother always knowing him better than he thought as he let his thumb rub over the jagged edges of the citrine crystal, the amethyst a comforting scratch against his knuckles while his breathing started to slow.

"I call on powers far and near

To banish all not welcome here.

This I ask, that you may

Send unwanted fears away.”

“You okay down there?”

Eddie absolutely did not scream. He didn't. He just yelled in a high-pitched way and jerked when he heard a voice that wasn't his in what was supposed to be an empty hallway. When he looked up, he saw crooked teeth set in metal with rainbow rubber bands and a pair of large blue eyes behind the thickest pair of glasses Eddie had ever seen. The guy's dark curls were a mess, flopping into his face when he tilted his head a little and Eddie realized he hadn't said anything after scream-yelling.

“What?” He barely croaked, the word not even really coming out, just a weird choked sound.

“Was just wondering if you were okay?” The guy asked. “Usually when someone is curled in the fetal position in the hallway it's not a good sign. You eat the chili surprise?”

Eddie could only stare, his hand still clutching his crystals tightly as he looked up at this crazy fae looking kid.

“Uhhh...” The other looked uncertain, worry flashing across his face for a minute. “Are...are you okay? Seriously. Can you not talk or something? Do you have an aid?”

Eddie frowned, not understanding what that meant but shook his head.

“No? No you aren't okay or no you don't have an aid?”

Eddie sat there, mouth agape before he scrambled up, grabbed his messenger bag and ran.

He ran and ran until he found one of the boy's bathrooms, grateful it was empty and locked himself inside for the remainder for fourth period. He sat on the toilet tank, not wanting to sit on the seat, and muttered quiet protection spells until he didn't feel like he wanted to die anymore. When he heard the bell ring, he sniffed and pulled out

his schedule, smoothing it against his knee as he looked at what he had for fifth period.

Lunch.

Eddie sighed, biting the inside of his cheek as he remembered Ben and how the boy had been so nice. Nice was something Eddie could use right now, and he took a deep breath, counted to ten and let it out as he folded his schedule back up.

He made sure to take a little bit of time primping in the bathroom. Splashing cold water on his face, making sure his eyes were so red rimmed and that his hair actually didn't look like he had been obsessively running his hands through it. When he had finished, he actually looked okay or as okay as Eddie Kaspbrak got when he was completely scared out of his mind. He tried a smile in the mirror, wondering if it looked fake and if Mike's friends would like him if he smiled more? Mike always smiled a lot, but Mike's smile always looked nice and made people feel good. Eddie's smile looked forced and nervous, which probably made people feel the same.

Ugh. Maybe don't smile.

He quickly made his way out of the bathroom when a group of older boys came in, ducking past them before they had a chance to say anything to him. As he made his way towards the cafeteria, he felt a little better knowing he would be eating with people who knew Mike and Mike was never friends with bad people. With that in mind he pushed the large metal door to the cafeteria open, surprised by how loud it was and how many kids fit in the room. He scanned the area and found the table Ben had been talking about, it occupied by two individuals already.

One with light brown curly hair and the other-

Oh no.

Eddie gulped, wondering if he should just go back to the bathroom and eat his lunch in the stall, but he quickly sucked it up and walked over to the table. The boy who had talked to him in the hallway was currently trying to shove a carrot into the other kid's mouth, easily

being shoved away and laughing before he noticed Eddie standing there.

Eddie swallowed.

“Well, well, well.” The dark-haired boy crooned, lifting up his legs so he could lay them on the table’s long bench. “If it isn’t my mute friend from the hallway. Stanny, this is the kid I was talking about.”

The other boy, Stan, gave Eddie barely a glance before going back to reading the book he had in front of him. Eddie frowned a little, standing up a little straighter as he tried to not be intimidated by these two. “I’m not mute. You just caught me at a bad time.”

The darker haired boy’s eyes widened, and an impossibly large grin spread across his face. “Oh! He talks! Look, Stan, my cute mute boy talks! It’s a miracle.”

Eddie felt his cheeks heat at being called cute, pretty sure that this boy meant it as an insult, and he had to stop himself from snapping at the other. Luckily before he could do anything stupid, he felt a hand on his shoulder and turned around to see Ben there with an exasperated look.

“Richie, leave him alone. Not everyone can handle you right away.” Ben moved to sit down and gestured for Eddie to do the same. “Sit here, Eddie. You bring a lunch or are you buying?”

“I brought mine.” Eddie muttered, sitting down next to Ben and placing his bag next to him. He watched as Ben took his own lunch bag out, surprised that it was only a bag of snap peas, an apple and a protein shake. The other two at the table seemed to have more normal food and Eddie took his lunch bag out of his bag and placed it on the table.

“So,” The one called Richie almost purred, resting his chin in both hands as he stared at Eddie with a smile. It made Eddie feel uncomfortable. “You’re names Eddie? You just move here or something, Eds?”

Eddie scrunched his face up. “Don’t call me that. My name is Eddie.”

“It’s a nickname, kid.”

“Eddie is already a nickname.” Stan said without even looking up from his book and Richie just rolled his eyes.

“Whatever. So, what’s your story, *Eddie*?”

Eddie had been about to growl at the sarcastic way Richie said his name when Ben interjected. “He’s Mike’s friend. Remember? The one he told us to be nice to?”

That seemed to change the entire attitude of the table. Suddenly Stan was no longer interested in his book, his attention immediately on Eddie and his expression almost a look of annoyance while Richie’s smile seemed to look more genuine.

“No way! This is Mikey’s homeschooling buddy?” Richie cried and reached a hand across the table towards Eddie. Eddie watched it for a moment warily before taking it in his and shaking it. “If I had known I would have rolled out the red carpet for you.”

“Err...thanks?”

Richie’s grin was so wide Eddie wondered if his cheeks hurt and he reached over to elbow Stan. “You hear that, Staniel? This is Mike’s (special) friend. The one that Mike is closest to and loooves hanging out with.”

Stan’s look turned murderous, but Eddie was thankful when it was turned on Richie instead of him and he watched as Stan shoved at Richie, hissing at him to shut up. The two sort of wrestled there on the bench and Eddie turned to Ben when he heard the boy sigh.

“Just ignore them. They get like this, especially Stan when Mike comes up.” Eddie wasn’t sure exactly what that meant, but he didn’t ask as Ben continued. “We have two more part of our group, Bev and Bill, but they don’t have lunch this period.”

Ben’s cheeks went slightly red and Eddie raised an eyebrow at that but kept quiet. Eddie glanced over, watching with a cringe as Stan pulled on a handful of dark curls and Richie let out a yelp of pain. He turned back to his lunch, pulling out the sandwich he had made and

bit into it, chewing slowly as the other boys seemed to settle down.

“So, Eds-“

“Eddie.”

“Yeah, yeah.” Eddie huffed a little when Richie waved his correction away. “So, what’s your deal? Mike told us you live in town but have been homeschooled your whole life like him? Your family like ultra-religious or something?”

That was one way to put it.

Eddie shrugged a little awkwardly. “Um, I guess? It’s more like my mom is really...protective? It took a lot just to get her to let me come here.”

“To public school?” Eddie nodded, taking out his apple and started peeling off the sticker. “Geeze. Most parents would give their right nut to get their kid outta the house.”

Eddie’s brow furrowed. “Well, not my mom. She likes me...where she can see me.”

“Yikes. That’s fucking creepy. She sounds like a real fun time.” Richie said, eyes widening with his teeth bared and Eddie scowled as he tried to fight down the urge to snap at this kid. His mom was awful, but Richie didn’t even know her so he could just shut the hell up.

“Richie, shut up.” Eddie tried to give a grateful smile to Stan, but the boy still looked like he’d Eddie had hexed him, so he quickly looked back down at his lunch. He continued to focus on eating, letting the others talk amongst themselves until he heard his name called.

“Huh?”

Richie grinned. “Iron Man or Batman?”

Eddie blinked and then glanced around to see three pairs of eyes watching him intently. “I’m sorry, what?”

Eddie huffed when Richie cupped his hands around his mouth and

acted like he was talking to someone who couldn't understand English "Iroooon Maaaaan or Baaaaatmaaaaaan?"

"I heard you." Eddie snipped. "I just don't understand what you're asking."

At the silence that followed his question Eddie suddenly felt like he'd said something dumb again. It made him mad honestly. Everything she had ever taught him was completely useless in public school. There was no potions or divination, even what was classified as history was about the whole world, nothing to do with the history of witches. Only thing that was similar was math and English, though the books they wanted him to know were a mystery.

"God damn it, Mama." He muttered, frustration building as everyone at the lunch table stared at him as if he were some kind of freak. He knew his face was red with embarrassment, but he tried to smile though it probably looked more pained than anything. "Sorry, did I say something wrong?"

Richie finally moved to fix his glasses before letting out a disbelieving laugh. "You seriously don't know who Batman is?"

Batman? A man who was part bat? Like a homunculus? No, alchemy was too far advanced a subject for teenagers. Was it a horror thing? That seemed to be something kids his age liked, right? Movies. It had to be a movie.

"Like the movie?"

The three boys looked at each other for a minute before Stan raised an eyebrow. "You mean like the seven movies and other spin offs?"

Eddie opened his mouth to reply when he felt something hard smack him in the back of his head and explode. He felt something wet run down his scalp, onto his neck and down his shirt. Eddie could only stare wide eyed at Richie who shot up out of his seat with a growl.

"Hey Bowers! What the literal fuck?!"

Eddie glanced down, the liquid running down his chin and onto the front of his shirt was a light brown color. It smelled sweet and Eddie

felt relief when he realized it was only chocolate milk. With it being Henry, it could have been something so much worse. He heard Henry laugh and just prayed that Patrick wasn't there with him.

"I heard," Mike whispered as they looked over the cauldron together. "That Patrick has started trying to dabble in blood magic."

"So, mommy finally let you out of your cage, fag?"

Eddie scowled and turned to look over his shoulder at the familiar snickering blond, clenching his fist in the fabric of his shorts as he tried to calm down.

"I'm getting a teacher." Stan said quietly and stood up, walking out even as Henry spewed slurs at him, calling him a snitch and that he wasn't surprised.

There was another boy next to Bowers, hair an awful yellow bleach blond and glaring at their table like they had personally wronged him. Eddie turned back to look at Richie when he seemed to get even more upset at Henry yelling things at Stan, moving around the table so he could move closer to Henry.

Richie was tall, but Bowers had at least forty pounds on him and only Eddie also knew Henry had magic on his side. Both Ben and Eddie shot up out of their seat when Richie moved to shove at Henry, the bigger boy immediately reaching out to push Richie to the ground with a rough shove. Richie went down hard with a grunt, sprawled across the white linoleum and Ben ran to his friend's side as Henry stomped towards them. Eddie didn't even think about it as he stepped forward, blocking the two from Henry's path and looked up at the taller boy with a glare.

Henry stopped and Eddie felt his heart start to race in fear when those cold blue eyes fixed solely on him, nasty smile coming to Henry's lips.

"Oh, girly boy going to step up?"

"Go away, Henry." Eddie hated that his voice wavered slightly, but he stood his ground even though he could feel his body shake.

“Yeah?” Henry asked and leaned closer, the overwhelming scent of burnt sage making Eddie’s nose itch. “You gunna tell mommy on me, little fag?”

Eddie raised his head a little higher so he could look down his nose at Henry. “Yeah, and you know *exactly* who she’ll go to when I tell her.”

The smile was immediately gone, replaced with such a hateful scowl that Eddie was sure he’d be killed right there in front of everyone. When Henry reached out and laid his hand on Eddie’s chest, Eddie instinctively did the same and held Henry’s gaze best he could while he felt faint from fear. He could feel the protection charm working, the fizzle of magic like static against his skin when Henry touched him. He took in a sharp breath through his nose when Henry moved a little closer and leaned down to whisper.

“Just because you’re my brother in the craft, doesn’t mean you’re safe.” Henry’s stale breath made Eddie want to vomit. “Only reason you’re standing right now is because we need you.”

Eddie frowned, confused by the words but then one of the teachers was bursting through the cafeteria doors with Stan in tow.

Henry quickly took a step back, spit on Eddie’s shoes and left with the other blond kid beside him.

That’s when Eddie’s legs finally gave out on him.

Having to walk around the rest of the day in his bright red gym shorts and grey gym shirt wasn’t as humiliating as he thought it would be.

Richie, Stan and Ben immediately helped Eddie to the school nurse after he’d collapsed in the cafeteria and Stan has offered to go get his gym clothes so he could change out of his chocolate stained clothes. After pleading with the nurse not to call his mom, Eddie laid on the cot in her office for a period before he was given permission to go

with the promise to come back if he felt off.

Compared to lunch, the rest of the day was a fucking breeze, even if history had given him a headache from so many facts and dates. Ms. Brill had found him after his last class and told him she was ready for him to meet his tutor if he wanted and he agreed even if the idea of more learning made him want to jump off the roof.

He pulled his bag up onto his shoulder as he followed her through the halls, answering her small talk questions best he could before they arrived at a small door with a sign that said, 'tutoring center'.

Well, here goes nothing.

He walked in after she held the door open for him and jumped when someone loudly greeted him.

"Eddie Spaghetti! As I live and breathe!"

Eddie could only stare in shock at Richie, who sat at the tiny little round table in the corner, his long jean covered legs just a tad too big for the chair he sat on as he waved enthusiastically at the smaller teen. Eddie glanced at Ms. Brill to see if this was a joke, but she just beamed as she made her way over to Richie and placed a hand on his shoulder. "Eddie, this is Richard Tozier. He'll be helping you with your chemistry and history."

Tozier? Well, wasn't that an interesting last name.

Eddie muttered a hello as he moved to the table and placed his bag down on the fake wood top, moving the chair out with his foot and plopping down in it. He shifted and tried to pull the red shorts down over his legs more, scowling when he heard Richie whistle.

"Alright, boys. I'll let you two get acquainted. Now, remember, Richie! You have to actually teach him; this isn't a time just to goof off."

Richie put his hand against his chest and acted like he'd been shot. "Amanda! You wound me! You know I'm a very serious student!"

Eddie rolled his eyes as Ms. Brill corrected Richie on what he is

supposed to call her and then she was gone with a wave and Eddie suddenly wondered if school was supposed to be this stressful. He must have been making a face because Richie reached out and poked his arm with a smile.

“I’m actually good at teaching. You don’t have to look so worried. I’ll get your grades up.”

Eddie frowned, not believing that for a minute. “I’m just surprised you’re actually smart.”

Eddie didn’t like the happy feeling he got when Richie laughed, and he quickly turned to look down at the top of the table. “So, do we actually have to study today? Because I’m really done with shoving things I don’t understand into my head for today.”

“We could try shoving other things in other places.”

Eddie blinked before trying to shoot up out of his chair, which didn’t work because his knees knocked against the underside of the table and he fell over onto the floor in pain.

“Jesus! You okay?”

“What the fuck?!” He yelled up at Richie, who had bent over to check on him and Eddie reached out and swatted at him. “Was that because of what Henry said? Cause if so, I’m going to-“

“Whoa whoa!” Richie held up his hands defensively and he quickly moved out of the way when Eddie got up, looking ready to attack. “No, I wasn’t saying that cause of- like it’s your own business if that’s true or not. I was just making a joke.”

Eddie stared at him for a long time, trying to gauge if that was true or not. When Richie didn’t seem to be lying, Eddie huffed and sat back down as he crossed his arms over his chest. “It was a really bad joke.”

“I’m sorry.”

“Terrible.”

“Alright.”

“I hate it more than I hate brussels sprouts.”

He glared when he heard Richie snicker.

“Sorry. You can’t blame a guy for trying, you’re pretty cute.”

Eddie felt his face explode with heat and he watched Richie for a moment to try and see if this was another joke. When the darker haired boy only continued to smile happily at him, Eddie shifted a little bit in his seat. “Are-you like that then?”

He had never admitted it out loud, Henry’s teasing enough to show that maybe he didn’t need to. Maybe everyone could just look at him and know that Eddie Kaspbrak enjoyed looking at boys more than he did girls, which wouldn’t be so bad if it didn’t get him ruthlessly made fun of in the coven.

“Kinda.” When Eddie frowned, Richie just shrugged. “I like both. I’m bisexual.”

“Oh.”

He’d heard that word used before, one of the women who had joined the coven a few years back had liked both girls and boys. She had been nice, always smiling and talking kindly to Eddie until her partner had gotten a job somewhere else and they had to move. He realized that Richie was waiting for more than that, so he tried to offer the other boy a small smile. “That’s cool?”

Eddie was relieved when Richie chuckled softly and nodded. “Yeah, I like to think I am.”

He rolled his eyes but couldn’t help the smile on his face as Richie shifted a little closer. “And...*If* I was, you wouldn’t mind?”

Richie’s face brightened and he leaned in close to whisper even though no one else was in the room with them, his breath smelling like a weird but nice combination of mint and strawberries. “Would I mind? Eddie Kaspbrak, I would be ecstatic.”

The excitement and happiness that bloomed in him made Eddie want to curl into a ball and yell, but instead he just tried to squish down an extremely giddy grin as he looked back over at his bag. “Well, good for you.”

Richie laughed again then moved closer so he could reach out and point at the inside of Eddie’s hands. “Do you lift or something? Those calluses are something fierce.”

Eddie looked down at his hands and curled his fingers in, so his palms were hidden, the dull skin toned band aids still visible around his fingers. No matter how much salve and ointments he put on his hands, they were still weathered and rough with little scars from nicks and scrapes. “No, um. I garden a lot. Lots of pulling, digging and lifting heavy pots.”

“Ah, that explains the guns you have. So, a regular green thumb, eh?” Eddie raised an eyebrow at the weird British accent Richie put on, but he shrugged in response. “We have a gardening club, ya know. If you want to join.”

Eddie shook his head, wondering if Richie was like this with everyone. “Nah. I don’t really do it because I like it, more like we need the garden and my mom can’t really take care of it much anymore.”

“Oh.” They were quiet for a bit, the silence not quite awkward but it still made Eddie feel like he needed to fill it. Luckily, Richie did that for him. “So, what do you like to do? I mean, we kind of already established you aren’t a comics guy.”

“Huh?”

“Batman?”

Richie smirked at him with a raised eyebrow and Eddie remembered the lunchroom conversation with embarrassment. So, Batman was a comic book. Okay. He would have to remember that. He gave another shrug as he tried to think of an answer that wasn’t about witchcraft and wouldn’t weird Richie out. “I don’t know. Um, I like to mess with my dad’s old car, so there’s that.”

Richie's eyes widened. "Shit, your dad lets you mess with his car?"

"Uh, well," Eddie squirmed in his seat a little, not used to someone not knowing about his dad's death. "Actually, he really can't stop me, cause he's kind of not here."

Richie sat back with a sad frown. "Aw geeze. He go out for milk or something?"

"What?" Eddie frowned at that, confused as hell to what that meant. "No? He died like ten years ago."

"Jesus!" Eddie jerked at Richie's unexpected outburst and he leaned back a little when the guy moved into his space. "I'm sorry, Eds! Shit, now I feel bad."

"Why?" Eddie asked slowly. "It's okay. It was a long time ago."

It wasn't. He still missed his dad so bad sometimes he would curl up in a ball in his bed with his dad's shirt and cry, but Richie didn't need to know that.

"Still," Richie started slowly. "I'm sorry. I can't even imagine..."

Richie went quiet and got this lost look on his face and suddenly Eddie felt like he was intruding on something, so he pulled his bag to him and slowly stood up. "Really, it's okay, but I should probably get going."

Richie seemed to snap out of it, and he stood as well. "You aren't going to hang with us today?"

"Uh?"

"Mike is coming too. I'm sure he wants to know how his best buddy did on his first day at school."

"You assume I won't be talking to him without you guys?" Eddie asked with a smirk, then shook his head. "I promised my mom I would come home right after school. This tutoring already set me back so I'm sure I'll get an earful about it."

Eddie moves towards the door but stopped when Richie called out to him, watching in amusement as the taller boy scrambled out of his seat to catch up with Eddie.

“At least give me your number so I can text you. We have a group convo I can add you to.”

Eddie stared blankly at him.

“Like...my phone number?”

“Yeah?” Richie replied slowly, slipping a small box out of his pocket and suddenly Eddie understood what he meant.

“Oh, you mean a cell phone number.”

Richie looked at him like he'd grown a second head. “Yeah. What did you think I meant?”

Eddie shook his head, shifting his bag higher up on his shoulder. “I don't have a cell phone. We have a landline if you want that number, just don't call after ten or my mom will kill me.”

“A land line? Like...those old phones attached to the wall?”

Eddie gave him an unimpressed look. “Yeah?”

“Shit.” Richie breathed and Eddie rolled his eyes. “Does it have the little turn thing on it too? Like the kind ladies talk on and then sit in their little fainting couches or something.”

“What the actual fuck, Richie?”

“It's a legitimate question!”

Eddie just shook his head and dug into his bag, pulling out a notebook and a pen. He flipped to the first page and scrawled the number he had memorized since he was five across the page, tearing it out and handing it to Richie. “Here.”

Richie took the paper and looked it over with a disbelieving smile. “Wow, old school. Number on paper. You could have just told me,

and I could have entered it in my phone.”

Eddie threw his hands up in exasperation. “Whatever! I have to go; I’ll see you tomorrow.”

Eddie pushed out the door, trying to continue looking annoyed even though he felt excited about someone besides the coven having his number.

“Bye, Eddie Spaghetti!”

“Not my name!”

The rest of the day went by as normal, getting home and taking his afternoon shower, dinner with his mom which consisted of defrosted plain frozen vegetables and a roast that was over cooked. When she asked how his day had been, he actually smiled and told her that it had been great and when she asked why he was wearing different clothes, he only shrugged and told her he had spilled milk on himself.

He quickly did his chores, smiling a little at his callouses this time when he had to pull up a few roots in the herb garden and clean his hands after he finished. He excused himself from the living room to go work on the few small assignments they had given him in school, suddenly wishing he knew Richie’s number so he could call and ask when he got stuck in chemistry. When the phone rang around eight, he quickly scrambled down the stairs yelling that he had it, knowing without a doubt who it was.

He picked up the phone a little out of breath, a large grin on his face. “Hey, Mike!”

He heard Mike laugh. “You run to answer the phone again?”

“Psssh. No.” He lied as he wrapped the long cord up and carried it through the kitchen, opening the back-porch door and stepping outside. Once he closed the door, he put the phone up to his ear again. “Alright. I’m outside.”

“Good. So, I hear a lot of things happened today. Apparently, you stood up to Henry?” Mike sounded a little shocked and Eddie shrugged, but then realized Mike couldn’t see that.

"Yeah, I guess." He muttered, twirling the cord around his finger as he watched a few birds fly into their garden. Mike laughed a little and Eddie could picture him in his yellow painted kitchen shaking his head.

"Just be careful when the coven meets on Friday. Make sure he doesn't get to you." Mike paused for a moment and Eddie could hear him moving around. "But besides all that, I think Richie is in love."

Eddie didn't know he could be both annoyed and excited at the same time and he shook his head with a scowl even though his cheeks went warm. "Shut up, Mike. He's weird."

"Says the forever homeschooled witch who's been locked up for like ten years."

Eddie groaned, knowing Mike had him there because even though Mike was homeschooled his whole life as well as being a witch, he probably at least knew what Batman was and he had a cellphone.

The Hanlons were so cool.

"It's not my fault my mom is batshit crazy."

"That's very true."

Mike and him talked for a good hour about everything that had gone on that day, Eddie grinning when he heard Mike stutter when he asked about Stan. Eddie picked at the peeling paint on the porch with a frown when he could tell it was getting time, he had to get off the phone, but wanted to ask one more question.

"Hey, Mike?"

"Yeah?"

"Henry said something to me today."

He heard Mike sigh. "Henry says a lot of things to you."

Eddie nodded. "Yeah, I know. But this was different. He threatened me like normal, but then said that the only reason I was like a bloody

pulp was because I quote ‘we need you’. What the hell is that about?”

He heard Mike hum in thought. “Uhhh...I don’t know but it doesn’t sound good. Being needed by Henry Bowers is a fucking terrifying idea.”

“Right?!” Eddie squeaked, not liking it at all and he sighed. “It freaks me out.”

“Eddie! Get off the phone and come inside!”

Eddie groaned quietly and he heard Mike do the same.

“I guess I’ll talk to you later.”

“Alright.” He heard Mike shift. “But hey, try and see if you can get your mom to let you come out with us soon after school. Bill and Bev really want to meet you.”

“I’ll try, but you know how that goes usually.”

“I know, but at least I can tell them you tried.”

Eddie smiles and nodded, gritting his teeth when he heard his mom call him again. “Yes, Mama! I’m coming! Alright, I have to go. I’ll talk to you later.”

“See ya.”

Eddie went inside and got ready for bed, going back into the living room to say goodnight to his mother. He pressed his hand against her chest as she did the same and then leaned down to kiss her cold clammy cheek. He made his way back upstairs and got under the covers, setting his alarm for tomorrow and turning out his reading lamp with a small smile.

His first day of school hadn’t been so bad.

Little did he know what was soon to come as he slipped into sleep to meet the gold eyes who liked to sing to him.

2. Monsters and Men

Notes for the Chapter:

A huge thank you to [Tinyarmedtrex](#) for betaing this chapter!

Warning Below

“And the wild things roared their terrible roars and gnashed their terrible teeth and rolled their terrible eyes and showed their terrible claws.”

— Maurice Sendak, *Where the Wild Things Are*

He was seven years old, they lived in their small home in California still, and the woman across the street was always very kind to him.

She would greet him everyday in the morning when he went to school and everyday when he would get back.

Smiling at him and waving.

She would always ask if he wanted to come inside for cookies or lemonade and he always felt bad when he had to say no.

Don't go with strangers, his mother had always told him.

But one day he asked the woman her name.

"Delilah." She replied.

"Well," He said, front teeth gone. "Now we aren't strangers."

One twilight evening, he had been playing in the yard when he saw Miss. Delilah come out from her house and wave at him. She asked him if he would like to come over and watch TV and since his mom was napping and dad was still at work he agreed.

Everything goes hazy after that, but he always remembered the blinding pain of the hot metal as it touched his skin, Delilah's face no longer sweet and smiling.

"You are monsters." She hissed as he screamed. "And after I'm done with you I'll get your monster parents too. Then you won't hurt anyone anymore."

He had blacked out from the pain and when he woke up he was in the hospital with his mother crying by his bed and his father holding his hand.

"There is something we have to tell you." His father said softly, fingers

brushing his cheek. “You need to know...”

Richie groaned as he heard the high-pitched sound of his phones alarm blare at him from his nightstand. He reached over to turn it on snooze for the seventh time, knocking over his half empty can of Arizona iced tea along with it. He knew in the back of his mind that it was probably spilling all over the orange thrift-shop shag carpet he'd bought a while back, but he was too sleepy to care as he rolled back over and cocooned himself in his comforter for the next ten minutes his phone allowed him.

Only his mother had other plans.

“RICHARD WENTWORTH TOZIER!”

Richie hissed, pulling his comforter over his head as he heard the familiar thumping sound of his mom's footsteps stomping up the stairs. He curled into the smallest ball he could when he heard his door open, knowing when she was standing over him with her hands on her hips.

“Get up, Richie.”

“Can't.”

“Oh? And why not?”

He wiggled around until he could pop some of his face out a small hole, his inky curls trying to fight for the space as well, so he squinted at her blurry image through a mess of black. Oh, nice. She was wearing the blue blouse his dad had gotten her for her birthday. At least he thought that's what that was.

“Umm...because, I have suddenly lost the ability to move my legs. I'm paralyzed now, Mother. It's a shame.”

“Oh, well if you can’t use your legs then I guess you have no need for your car.”

Richie narrowed his eyes and pursed his lips, trying to go for a glare but he was pretty sure he looked more like he ate a sour lemon. Maggie has never been intimidated by him anyway, so he groaned dramatically and pushed the covers over, kicking his feet as he went.

“Oh my god, Mags! It’s a miracle!”

“The lord is real.” She replied dryly and then shook her head with a smile threatening to pull on the side of her mouth. “And I’m mom, not Maggie.”

He gave her a small salute. “Yes, Queen mum.”

He watched her blurry image throw up her hands, probably with an exasperated face, and turn around towards the door, but not before looking over her shoulder at him. “Be downstairs in thirty minutes or I’m giving all your bacon to your dad.”

“What?” He cried, reaching for his glasses on the nightstand and slipping them on his face. The world was clear again and he could see his mom’s raised eyebrow. “You can’t do that! What about his heart? You’ll kill him, Ma. I’m too young to have my mom incarcerated for cholesterol murder.”

“Well, then you better get moving.” She replied as she walked out. “Hurry and save your father’s life!”

Richie heard his dad make a questioning noise from down in the kitchen before he pushed himself off his bed, grabbed his phone and went over to the large terrarium near his desk.

“Hello, beautiful.” He cooed, reaching in to let his fingers dance lightly over the shimmery white scales of his baby. When she picked her head up, flicking her tongue out to smell him, Richie grinned and gave her another gentle touch. Karen wasn’t like normal California Kingsnake, after the initial hissing and rattling of her tail when he’d first found her, she hadn’t once done it again after he had taken her home. She coiled around his outstretched finger and held on for a

second before slithering back through her bark chips to where the heating pad was under her cage. "I'll feed ya when I get home tonight, okay?"

He laughed when she didn't acknowledge him and placed the lid back on her cage as he moved out into the hallway. Plucking a clean towel from the linen closet, he closed the bathroom and hooked his phone up to the speaker he kept in there, pulled up Spotify and selected his morning playlist.

Richie grinned when the opening guitar riff of The Strokes Last Night blared to life and he reached back to pull his t-shirt over his head and shimmy out of his boxers. He stood in front of the sink for a minute, looking himself over in the mirror with a small sigh before slipping his glasses off and moving to turn on the water.

He showered quickly, but not before giving himself an amazing soap mohawk, and picked his outfit without even looking. He hopped down the last step of the stairs as he buttoned his fly, throwing his hands up high in the air when he entered the kitchen where his parents were.

"Mummy, Daddy." He greeted, pitching his voice through his nose to sound more nasally. "Isn't it a simply divine morning?"

He heard his mom snort while his dad laughed at his voice, making Richie grin as he reached out to swipe a piece of toast from the plate in the middle of the table. Slathering it with butter and jam, he bit into it while he watched his dad finish reading the paper.

"So, what have you got going on this weekend, Rich?"

His dad's question surprised him, but only because he had been spacing out and he gave a small shrug before answering. "Not much. I have a dumb paper to write for Comp and I think the gang is going down to Mike's farm to look at the new litter of kittens his barn cat had."

"That sounds fun." Maggie replied as she set a plate of scrambled eggs in front of Richie with them drowning in ketchup.

Holy shit! Eggs and ketchup?

He had the best mom.

“Yeah. I mean, it’s baby animals. How can you I go wrong?” With that said he started stuffing his face, completely missing the look his parents exchanged over his bent over head. After he had wolfed down more than half his plate, he wiped his mouth with his sleeve and noticed them acting strangely quiet.

Richie frowned. “Why?”

“No reason,” Wentworth started before Maggie sent him a chastising glare and he sighed. “Your mother and I have to go out of town this weekend. So, we are trusting you with the house.”

Richie stopped mid-bite, frowning when his dad refused to make eye contact and his mom stared at him like it was a challenge. He slowly put his fork down and stood up a little straighter, narrowing his eyes as he looked between the two of them. “You guys are going? You’re just going to leave me behind?”

Maggie immediately rolled her eyes. “Dear god, Richie, you make it sound like we’re abandoning you.”

Went looked at least a little more guilty. “We’ll be back Sunday night, son. It really isn’t even that big of a trip, I swear you’d be bored.”

“Bullshit.” Richie growled, ignoring the way his mom hissed at him about language. “I should be going! I’m a part of this family too.”

“A part of this family who has a paper to write.” His mother frowned and Richie couldn’t help the ugly scowl he sent her way. He’d dug his own grave by telling them that, but they had been sneaky, and Richie didn’t appreciate anyone being sneaky unless it was him.

He looked down at his plate, his mood sour now and he realized something. “Oh my god! These apology eggs! You took my favorite breakfast and used them for your twisted ways!”

“Richie...” Went started but stopped when Maggie stood up from the table with her coffee cup.

“You need to focus on school, Richie.”

“I’m getting As in every class except gym, which you told me to do!” He yelled, wincing a little when his raised voice echoed back at him. “Only reason you’re doing this is because you don’t want me there.”

“You’re absolutely right I don’t.”

It was obvious but having her say it to his face hurt more than he thought it would and he shoved his plate away from him. He stood up with a huff, chair screeching loudly against the floor, and went to gather his things for school, shoving his feet into his ratty converse before finding his brown leather bomber jacket. He was about to walk out the door, planning to let the screen door slam behind him when he felt someone catch his arm.

Richie turned back to glare at the person, his dad, but couldn’t do it for too long since Went had always been in Richie’s corner when he needed him.

“What?” He huffed.

“I’ll talk to her, Rich.” Went said softly, the hand on his arm moving to pat Richie’s upper back. “You know she only does it because she’s worried.”

Richie sighed, nodding his head slightly. “I know, but she doesn’t have to be.”

Went let out a soft chuckle. “She’s your mom, Rich. You will be fifty-three and she’ll still worry, you remember the baby proofing story.”

Richie sighed and pushed away from his dad and a little more out the door, not wanting to hear the story about how crazy Mags had gone baby proofing when Richie was born. He gave a small wave to his dad, smiling a little when Went told him he’d talk to her and made his way to his beat-up truck. He threw his bag over to the other seat and jumped in, thanking the lord when his truck started without an issue and pulled out of the driveway.

When he got to school, he had exactly twenty minutes before he had to be in homeroom, parking diagonally in two parking spots before

jumping out and booking it to the property line at the end of the parking lot. He grinned when he saw that fluffy red hair sitting in the grass and he sat down next to her with his hand extended.

“My cancer stick, my lady?”

Bev snorted and pulled out her carton of cigarettes, sliding one out for him and he plucked it up thankfully. He ran his tongue over his braces before putting the cig in his mouth and leaning over to touch the tip to Bev’s lit one, it lighting after a moment and he took a deep drag of the sweet smoke.

“Ah, that’s the stuff.” Richie sighed and settled back against his bag. “God, what would I do without you, Marsh?”

Bev snorted as she took a drag of her own cigarette. “Probably not have a smoking addiction.”

“Or know where to get the best pot.”

Bev laughed and reached out to kick his ankle. “You make me sound so great; I’m recruiting you to write up my college essay.”

“Oh, I’ll gladly do it for you, baby.”

“I’m sure you would.” She muttered with a chuckle, taking the last drag off her cigarette before stubbing it out on the heel on her combat boot. “You coming to the farm over the weekend?”

Mention of the weekend made Richie remember his parents and he sighed loudly before laying down fully in the grass. “Yeah, I guess.”

The view of the early October red and yellow leaves were blocked when Bev leaned over him with an eyebrow raised. “Well, gee. Don’t sound too excited there, buddy.”

Richie shook his head, feeling a few of the blades of grass slip between his curls to lightly tickle his scalp.

“Sorry, it’s not that.” He explained, sitting up and putting the cigarette to his mouth, sucking in before blowing out. He was trying not to get irritated again. His dad had said he would talk to her about

it. "They are going away for the weekend for business and are leaving me at home."

"Okay, Richie. I'm going to tell you something." Bev started, reaching out to grip his shoulder through his jacket and made sure he was looking at her before she continued. "Most teens would eat their left arm to be left alone at home for the weekend. I mean, come on! Do whatever you want and shit?"

Richie took one more drag before stubbing his cigarette out in the grass, shaking his head a little because Bev just didn't get it. Not like he could really explain it to her, so he just sighed and gave a halfhearted shrug.

"Yeah, I guess."

"You guess? Okay weirdo." She huffed with a laugh. "I mean think about it, the group could come over, I could bring the contraband and we could have a small little party. I bet if we asked quick enough even Eddie's mom would let him out of jail."

Oh.

Eddie.

Richie turned his head so that Bev wouldn't be able to see his face while he tried to get it under control, a goofy smile coming to his face as he thought about the weird boy.

Eddie was...something else, man.

He didn't have a cell phone, he knew about cars, he didn't know what yeet meant, he was hopeless at typing on a laptop, he had a cute nose and great laugh, funny even when he didn't get modern references and just the most interesting person Richie had ever met.

"Well," He said after he cleared his throat, turning back to look at Bev when he had tamped down the crazy smile. "It's always good to have a teen drinking party in the name of helping the poor shut in."

Bev rolled her eyes with a knowing smile, but Richie was thankful when she didn't say anything else and instead stood up with her

backpack. Richie followed her lead and together they made their way back towards the school, only smelling a little bit like cigarette smoke, but that's what the large spray bottle of febreze in Richie's locker was for.

It wasn't like Richie was a genius.

Really, he wasn't.

He didn't like the term gifted either.

He just happened to take all AP classes and do well in them with minimal effort. School just came easy to him, which is probably why he did so well in it because if it had been hard, he probably would have given up immediately.

Eh. He knew his flaws.

Richie sighed as Mr. Tumnus wrote the calculus problem on the board, picking on the poor kids who didn't even raise their hands to get up and solve it. He watched for a few minutes as the kids up at the board started to sweat before glancing out the window to watch six period gym run laps around the football field.

He watched as one of the kids started to fall behind the group, stopping to catch a breath by leaning down and resting their hands on their knees. It reminded him of the conversation he'd had with Eddie a week or two ago...

"What is that little silver thing you carry around?" Richie asked, leaning over to poke at Eddie's bag where he knew the small silver whatever was in. Eddie frowned in confusion before realizing what Richie meant and gave a small troubled sigh.

"Oh," He started quietly, looking almost embarrassed. "It's my medicine."

"You sick?" Richie gave the guy a quick once over but couldn't really see anything wrong with Eddie. He looked perfectly healthy and cute as always.

"I have asthma." Eddie said softly, looking at his textbook like it was the most interesting thing on the planet. "That what my medicine is for and also a cough I have."

Richie frowned. "Aren't you supposed to have an inhaler for asthma? Not medicine?"

Eddie suddenly seemed really nervous and Richie felt bad even though he didn't think he'd said anything wrong of offensive.

"My mom is....kinda like...a naturalist?"

"Oh shit." Richie reared back. "Please tell me your mom vaccinated your sweet self. I can't deal if you get the measles."

Eddie scowled and threw his eraser at him, Richie catching it easily before it could fly off to the other side of the room. When Eddie didn't answer Richie reached out to poke him in the side with a questioning sound of alarm.

"Oh my god! Yes, Richie. I've been vaccinated. Just because my family relies on natural medicine a lot doesn't mean we are stupid!"

Richie felt his chest ease up a little but sighed when he realized Eddie was actually mad about his question.

"Eds."

He was completely ignored, Eddie's brow furrowing deeply as he continued to try and 'concentrate' on the textbook in front of him.

"Eddie?"

Silence.

"Eddie, come on. It was just a--"

Eddie turned on him so fast that Richie barely had time to move back, large dark eyes narrowed in anger and the scowl on his face made Richie's stomach feel cold.

"I get it was just a joke to you, but that's how my family lives, okay? You can make all the dirty hippie jokes you want but don't ever think that we're stupid because we believe certain things you don't."

Richie stared in shock for a minute, mouth hanging open before his brain caught up and he tried to fix it. "I never said you were stupid."

"You didn't have to." Eddie growled. "Your constant jokes about me not knowing anything are enough."

Richie had been about to defend himself when he thought back over the past month since meeting Eddie. He made jokes at his friends' expense constantly, but it was never to be mean and they all knew it, but Eddie was new to the group. Richie bit his lip, guilt building in his gut at the idea of Eddie really believing Richie thought he was stupid.

"I'm sorry." He whispered, Eddie looking at him with a doubtful expression. "I'm never serious when I joke around, at least not with my friends."

Eddie turned back to his textbook, his face unreadable from just the profile and he was quiet for a very long time. Richie started to scramble for a way to fix this, not wanting Eddie to think he was some massive jerk when he heard Eddie clear his throat.

"So...we're friends?"

Richie blinked when he noticed the soft flush on Eddie's cheeks and the way he held himself perfectly still which ruined how he was trying to look casual. Richie smiled a little and gave a nod even though Eddie wasn't even looking at him.

"Yeah, Eddie. We're friends. I mean, at least I consider us friends."

There was no missing the large smile that made its way onto Eddie's face and he moved so he could rest his chin on his hand so it would cover it.

"That's cool. I consider you my friend also."

Richie grinned. "Cool."

An uncontrollable smile tugged at his lips at the memory, watching the random kid catch up with the rest of his class, when suddenly his phone buzzed in his pocket. He glanced down at his pants with a bored look, knowing it was probably Bev sending him a photo of what she'd made in shop class and went back to staring out the window.

Then his phone started buzzing uncontrollably and he frowned, glancing at the Mr. Tumnus to make sure he wouldn't see as he reached in to pull out his phone. He glanced down at it and almost let out a loud noise when it told him he had fifteen unread messages.

"What the fuck?" He whispered as he let the phone scan his face and unlock, quickly going to his messages and holding back a groan when he saw the first message in a group chat.

[Bevy-Wevy]: PARTY AT RICHIE'S THIS WEEKEND! 🍰🍷🎉

[Bevy-Wevy]: I'm supplying all the contraband, so I need you guys to pull your weight and get food and non-illegal drinks.

[Stan the Man]: I have like four papers to write and they are all due Monday. There's no way.

[Beautiful Farm Boy]: I'm in!

[Beautiful Farm Boy]: I need to let off steam after helping with the harvest and jam making.

[Stan the Man]: I guess I can move things around.

[Beautiful Farm Boy]: 😊

[Haystack]: I'm in and I can't bring a bunch of chips and snacks. My mom went grocery shopping again...

[Carrot Pubes ♥👤]: I'll come. I just have to help Georgie with a project and then I can drive over. I can pick up some soda.

[Bevy-Wevy]: Awesome!

[Bevy-Wevy]: This is going to be so much fun! 👤

[Beautiful Farm Boy]: Can we invite Eddie?

[Stan the Man]: Will his mom even let him out of the house?

[Carrot Pubes♥👤]: Won't know till we try.

[Stan the Man]: 🤨

Richie quickly glanced up to make sure his teacher wasn't looking before bending his head down to type a response to this craziness.

[Richie]: Wtf, Marsh?! 🤨

[Bevy-Wevy]: 😊 Hi honey!

[Carrot Pubes ♥👤]: What time you want us over, Rich?

Richie let out a weird aggravated noise before typing out another quick message.

[Richie]: Okay, first off, that red headed witch we lovingly call our friend didn't even ask me about this. Second, aren't like at least four of you supposed to be in class?

[Bevy-Wevy]: Jesus grandma calm down. It will be fun! We can all sleepover and everything!

[Beautiful Farm Boy]: Please, Richie. I'll bring my mom's fresh

biscuits and a jar of the jams we made!

[Richie]: How DARE you tempt me with Jessica Hanlon's baking. That's low, you gorgeous bastard.

[Haystack]: I think it could be really fun.

[Carrot Pubes ♥👤]: Come on, Richie. Dooooooooooooo iiiiiiiiiiit.

[Richie]: Stan? As my dearest and most sensible friend please tell these butt hoses that they are being ridiculous.

There was silence from Stan's end, which made sense seeing as he was in yearbook right now, but Richie was surprised and betrayed when he felt his phone vibrate.

[Stan the Man]: Party at Trashmouth's.

[Beautiful Farm Boy]: YES! 🤩

[Haystack]: Woo! 🥳

[Bevy-Wevy]: You're my favorite, Stan!

[Carrot Pubes ♥👤]: Awesome!

[Richie]: I hate every single one of you. So much.

[Beautiful Farm Boy]: Can someone tell Eddie?

[Bevy-Wevy]: Who sees him next? What does he have right now?

Richie sighed, having lost the argument due to Stan probably just wanting to mess with him mixed with wanting to stare like a dumbass at Mike all night, and started typing.

[Richie]: I see him for tutoring. I can tell him, which is how it should have gone for all of you, MARSH. 🐱

[Bevy-Wevy]: Get over it. I'll bring the extra good stuff if you forgive me.

[Richie]:

[Richie]: We will talk about forgiveness when you bring the goods.

[Bevy-Wevy]: 🍷❤️

Richie smiled at the little heart she sent, running a finger over it and even though the annoyance at being tag teamed like that he felt a little better than he had this morning. He moved to start typing another message when he heard someone clear their throat in front of him off to the side and he glanced up into Mr. Tumnus' unhappy face.

"Mr. Tozier. Is that your phone I see?"

"Shit."

Richie watched as Eddie flipped through his flashcards, muttering under his breath as he read each one out loud and then closed his eyes to answer. Richie drummed the eraser end of his pencil against the open notebook on the table and smiled when Eddie's nose scrunched up when he got an answer incorrect.

Honestly, tutoring Eddie was becoming one his favorite things to look forward to at the end of the school day on Wednesdays and he had no idea if that was sweet or lame. Would Eddie even want to come hang out at his house? Eddie had been around the gang enough times where the guy didn't really seem new anymore. He zinged right back

with Stan's sarcasm, could get up to no good like him and Bev, liked to listen to Ben's poetry and he was already besties with Mike.

The only issue Richie took with Eddie being so good with their group was how well he got on with Bill. God, sometimes Eddie looked at the guy like he personally hung the stars, which, okay, to be fair Bill had this thing about him.

This thing that made everyone want to like him.

What a *hardship* for Bill.

It wasn't that Richie was jealous, really, of either of them. It's just he got nervous anytime someone in the group started to like the other and vice versa after how bad things had become when Bev and Bill decided to call it quits. He never wanted their circle to go through that again, which was why he was so cautious about the dumb cow eyes Stan and Mike kept sending each other.

And yeah, okay, maybe he was a little jealous.

He came back to the real world when he heard Eddie let out a frustrated groan and throw the cards across the table, folding his arms with an impressive scowl.

"This is fucking hopeless. I should just go into the lower class."

"Hey, come on. You aren't doing that bad."

Richie tried not to smile at the look that Eddie gave him which clearly meant 'are you kidding me?'

"Here, let's take a break. We've been going for an hour now; all work and no play makes Jack a dull boy." When Eddie gave him a blank stare at his Jack Nicholson impression, Richie gave a small shrug and moved on. "But yeah, breaks are important cause after a while your brain stops taking in anything if it's too overworked."

"Is that real or did you make that up?"

Richie gave a small shrug. "It could be, I just know that if I have to focus on something for a long time, I tend to start losing it after a

bit.”

Eddie looked back over at the flashcards for a second before letting a big breath out and nodding. “Yeah, okay. It makes sense. So, what should we do for our break?”

“Whatever you want.” Richie replied with a smile. “We could go get a drink of water, rob a bank or just sit and talk about non-school stuff. Like this get together I’m having on Friday that you should come to.”

Smooth, Tozier.

Eddie’s face went from calm and happy to unsure in a second and he shifted a little in his seat. “Uhh, a get together? Is that like a party?”

“I mean, in a way yeah?”

Richie felt worried when Eddie didn’t seem thrilled about the idea, wiggling a little bit more in his seat and hunching his shoulders.

“Um, thanks for inviting me but I don’t think I’m really ready to be around a bunch of people I don’t know yet.”

Richie stared at the other for a moment before letting out a loud laugh, startling Eddie and causing him to glare at Richie for it. Richie held out his hands and shook them as he tried to stop his laughter. “Sorry! Sorry! I’m not laughing at you!”

He chuckled more. “Well, I mean I guess I kind of am but not really. It’s not that kind of party, I’m not throwing some kind of crazy rave or something. It’s just for the gang, six people, seven of you come.”

“Oh.” Eddie’s glare turned into surprise and he glanced down at his hands in his lap, wringing them a little bit. “This Friday?”

Richie nodded. “Yeah. We’re also having it kind of be like a.... sleepover makes it sound like we are in grade school, but you can stay the night if you want.”

Eddie looked at him in shock. “Really? I’ve only ever slept at Mike’s house before and that was back when...I mean, it’s been awhile since I’ve done that.”

“I mean you don’t have t-“

“No! I want to!” Richie jumped when suddenly Eddie was in his space, face so close to his Richie could see the spatter of freckles across his tanned little nose. “I really want to!”

Richie couldn’t help the large happy grin the spread across his face and he gave a small nod. “Okay, Eds. I believe you.”

Only then did Eddie seem to realize how close he had pushed himself and he sat back in his seat immediately, his chair squeaking at the sudden movement. He was really quiet for a second, cheeks and neck a bright red that made Richie want to compare the color to the bright strawberries Maggie grew. He was so lost in admiring Eddie’s cheeks that he startled a little when Eddie finally spoke again.

“My mom and me usually have this thing we do on Friday nights.”

“Oh.” Richie tried not to sound too disappointed, but it was hard.

“But I think I can try and get myself out of it if I really beg.”

The smile Eddie sent him made Richie’s heart beat faster and he suddenly felt a little lightheaded.

“O-oh?” He sounded breathless and that was just stupid. All Eddie was doing was smiling at him, he needed to get himself under control. “I bet you beg real pretty.”

There we go.

Eddie’s exasperated look was still cute but at least it didn’t make Richie feel like he was about to faint, and he leaned back in his chair with a smile. Eddie just shook his head after a moment and reached across the table to get his flashcards before settling back in his seat to look through them again.

“Anyway, I’ll try to make it.”

Richie felt like he’d just accomplished something amazing.
“Awesome.”

Wednesday passed quicker than normal and he wondered if it was because he was in such a good mood after asking Eddie. He didn't even try to stay mad at his mom, which he could tell shocked her because normally when Richard Tozier was mad, he could hold onto it for dear life. Planning the hangout was actually starting to become fun, him and Bev had made a list of all the stuff they needed; movies, pizza, booze, pot and he was really starting to really look forward to this thing.

It absolutely helped that Eddie had somehow gotten permission to come and was so freaking excited about it.

He told Richie that he'd never been to a friend's house besides Mike's and he had never spent the night with a group before. Honestly it was so damned cute to watch Eddie get so hyped about something so simple.

He couldn't stop thinking about that excited smile, even as he lay on Stan's bed on Thursday as his friend flipped through Richie's calculus homework.

"You got number six wrong. Richie?"

"Huh?"

He turned his head to the side to be met with a glare and Stan looked more irritated than normal.

"What the hell is going on with you? You've been spacing out more than normal today. Are you high? I told you I won't do homework with you while you're high." He looked even more annoyed when Richie just laughed and shook his head. "Then what is it?"

"Sorry, Staniel." Richie replied loudly, moving to roll onto his stomach so he could lay his head on his crossed arms. "I'm just thinking about Friday's hangout."

"You mean the hangout you didn't want to have until yesterday?" Richie rolled his eyes at Stan's clearly unimpressed look.

"Yeah? Well, now I want to have it, so I'm excited about it."

Stan looked down at Richie's homework, seeming a little hesitant as he bit his lip and that was really weird because Stan was never hesitant to speak his mind with Richie. Richie moved to sit up and frowned. "What?"

"Is it because Eddie said he could come?"

Richie felt his cheeks flush a little and he moved to scratch at his head before pushing his glasses back up his nose. "I mean, that's an added plus, I guess?"

When Stan sighed Richie frowned. "Okay seriously, Stan. Knock it off. The whole passive aggressive thing towards Eddie was fine when he was new, but it's been like more than a month now."

"That's not true."

"God, Stan. Really?" Richie groaned. "If it wasn't for the rest of us being nice to him, I don't think he'd want to hang out with us because you're such a bastard to him sometimes."

Stan looked a little ashamed at that and Richie sighed as he crossed his legs, laying his hands on his knees.

"You know they're just friends, right?"

"What the fuck are you talking about?" Stan's tone was harsh, but he wouldn't look at Richie which meant that he knew exactly what Richie meant. Richie rolled his eyes and sighed, flopping back down on the bed on his back, kicking both of his long legs up into the air and holding them there.

"There's no way Mike and Eddie are a thing. Mike is too gaga over you."

"Don't say that." He heard Stan hiss and honestly, Stan's issues with thinking anyone could like him romantically, especially Mike, was getting old quick.

"I'm just telling the truth; you know I'd never try to make you feel better by lying to you." Richie said with a bit of annoyance in his tone and when Stan didn't reply, he let out another sigh. "Besides, if

Eddie was going to be with anyone it's probably be Bill."

That got Stan's attention. He turned around to look at Richie with a confused look. "Bill?"

"Yeah?" Richie answered back.

"Why?"

"Cause," Richie exclaimed, reaching up to grab his toes, holding on and giving his legs a deep stretch. "I mean, have you seen the way he looks at Bill? It's really obvious."

Stan screwed up his face. "It's really not. At least I haven't seen anything like that."

"You're blind then."

"No, you're blind. Figuratively and literally."

Richie huffed as he let go of his toes, his feet and arms falling back down to the bed with heavy thumps and he laid sprawled there. He wasn't blind, not when it came to how people looked at Bill and Eddie for sure had a certain look when he watched the redhead. Great, now he was starting to feel a little depressed.

"Whatever. Just stop being a jerk to Eddie."

Stan grumbled some kind of answer and Richie was suddenly too tired to bother asking him to repeat himself. He sat up and crawled up so he could lay his head down on Stan's pillow, ignoring the squawk his friend made about sharing pillows as he slipped his glasses off. He tossed them over on Stan's nightstand and closed his eyes, glad when Stan didn't bother him and just let him fall asleep.

School on Friday dragged, but that was probably due to the fact that he had something to look forward to after school. When the final bell rung, he booked it to his locker, sneakers squeaking on the linoleum as he almost slid past his locker. Even when Belch Huggins slammed into him on the way out, he couldn't care.

He was about to have a fun night with his friends and it didn't have to end at eleven!

He drove home a little faster than he probably should have (okay a lot faster), parking a little crookedly in the driveway as he jumped out of the car after killing the engine.

He needed to at least semi-clean his room before people came over, glad for once that Mags was a bit of a stickler when it came to chores and keeping the rest of the house clean. He opened the front door and slung his backpack onto the floor, not even bothering to pick it up as he kicked off his shoes and headed right upstairs.

He had only started putting his dirty clothes in hamper and making a small pile of garbage when he heard a knock on his open door, looking up to see both his parents standing there.

"Are you cleaning your room?" Maggie asked a little shocked while his dad looked at him bewildered.

"Uh," Richie stood up straight, holding a large black trash bag and looked around, not wanting them to get suspicious. "Yeah? I just...I don't know. Got tired of the mess?"

His parents exchanged a look and Richie frowned, but he didn't want to get into anything right before they left so, he let it go.

"You guys getting ready to leave?"

His father's face suddenly brightened, even though his mother still looked a little hesitant and Richie blinked when both his parents moved into the room. When his father came over to him and grabbed his shoulder, giving it a squeeze with that wide happy smile Richie knew something was happening.

"We talk about it, bud." Went started, it taking a moment for Richie

to figure out what he was talking about, but then he remembered. “And we noticed how you didn’t let our earlier decision get to you; it was very mature of you. So, we both decided that you should be able to come on the trip with us.

Richie stared at his dad in surprise. “What?”

Went laughed. “See, Maggie? Boy is so happy he’s in shock.”

Maggie just rolled her eyes, but there was a small smile on her lips as she shook her head and turned back towards the hallway. “You better pack fast or we’ll leave you, understand? And I want to see your laptop packed as well so you can work on your paper while we’re there.”

Both his parents started to make their way out, his head still swimming with the news that he could come when he suddenly remembered.

“Ah! Wait!”

Went and Maggie turned to look at him questioningly and he had the words on the tip of his tongue. *I can’t go because I made plans with my friends and one of them is really excited about it and honestly so am I that he’s coming.*

But when he opened his mouth, all that came out was... “I’ll be ready in fifteen. Just don’t leave without me.”

When his parents were finally gone, Richie let out an excited yell and ran to his closet to find his duffel bag and started throwing clothes in. In between packing shirts, he pulled out his phone and sent a message to the group chat.

[Richie]: Guys! Have to cancel tonight! Parents are letting me go with them this weekend.

It wasn’t long before the replies started pouring in.

[Bevy-Wevy] : what the fuck, Richie?! ☐

[Carrot Pubes♥☐] : seriously? Super lame. 🙄

[Haystack] : Bummer 🙄

[Beautiful Farm Boy] : 🐱

[Stan the Man] : you suck

Richie frowned down at the responses of his friends and slipped the phone into his back pocket. He could text them on the drive, continuing to pack until he was done and went to grab his laptop and charger before heading downstairs. He was pulling his shoes on when he felt his phone buzz a few more times and he sighed as he pulled it out to check.

[Bevy-Wevy] : Someone call and tell Eddie. Mike?

[Stan the Man] : I think Richie should do it since he's the one canceling on us. 🙄

Richie grit his teeth, suddenly remembering Eddie and how he was looking forward to tonight. He cursed under his breath, banging his head gently against the front door when he heard his dad honk the car horn at him. He quickly poked his head out and yelled that he needed to do something real quick and rapidly typed out a message.

[Richie] : Fuck. You guys suck.

He quickly scrolled through his contacts until he found Eddie's name, his thumb hovering over the simple black letters with the little pill

emoji. He could just turn around and tell his parents he wasn't going and have the party, see Eddie's happy face as they danced, watched movies and drank.

He swallowed as he pressed the call button and held it to his ear, not sure if he was thankful or not when Eddie picked up instead of his mother.

"Kaspbrak residence."

"Hey..." Richie said softly, glancing out the window to see his parents still waiting. "It's me."

"Richie!" The way Eddie said his name, so full of happiness, made Richie weirdly want to cry. "What's up? I'm so ready for tonight. I just have to eat dinner with my mom and then I'll head over."

Oh, God. "Umm...about that. Thing is I kind of have to cancel."

There was silence in the other line and if he couldn't hear the very faint sound of a television on in the background Richie might have thought Eddie had hung up on him. He almost wished he had because hearing what Eddie said now hurt.

"Oh?" He sounded so quiet all of a sudden. "Um, is everything alright?"

"Oh! Yeah." Richie replied, holding up his hand in the window so his parents knew he was coming. "Yeah, I just, see my parents originally weren't going to let me go on this trip, but they changed their minds so I'm going to go with them."

It was quiet again and Richie's leg started to jiggle as he waited for a reply. When none came, he bit his lip and picked up his duffle bag when his dad honked the horn again.

"Eddie? You okay?"

"Yeah." Came the soft reply, barely above a whisper and Richie had a panicking moment when he thought it sounded like Eddie was crying.

"Shit, Eddie. I'm sorry? This is just really important to me so..."

“No, no. It’s okay.” Eddie still sounded quiet, but he didn’t sound like he was crying anymore, and Richie wished that made him feel a little better.

“I have to go, but umm...I’ll see you Monday?”

“Yeah.”

“Okay...” He waited, for what he didn’t know, as he moved to throw his duffle bag in the trunk, but when Eddie didn’t say anything else, he sighed. “Alright. Bye?”

“Bye, Richie.”

When the line went dead, Richie leaned his forehead against the back window for a minute, a small pit growing in his stomach. When his dad yelled at him from the front, Richie quickly got in the back and shut the door with a sigh.

Well, if he ever had a chance against Bill it was gone now.

Bangor was nice.

He’d have to remember that for later.

Richie slipped the small bluetooth earpiece into his ear and he pulled the mask up over his mouth. He could hear his mom and dad in the piece going over the strategy again as he checked his crossbow for the tenth time.

The waiting to start was always the most nerve wracking.

They could research and recon till the cows came home, but once it came down to it, none of them knew what those witches had in store for them. Richie still had the scar on his stomach from his first

encounter with one, when she's pressed a hot fire poker against it.

He squinted a little when he felt one of his contacts shift, hating that he had to wear them on the job, but glasses were hard with physical activity.

"Eyes, you get that info?" His dad's voice called over the line and Richie hummed softly in response.

"Got it all, Teeth." He replied.

"The Coven's building is sixty feet ahead of you, Eyes. I want you to go in from the front while Teeth goes through the back. I'll keep a lookout while you two get the job done. We all clear?"

"Yes, Brain." Richie replied and checked his stash of supplies again.

Hex proof bag? Check.

Silver knives? Check.

Rosary? Check.

Richie grinned at that one, wondering not for the first time if it even protected him since he wasn't a practicing catholic. He wasn't even close to even Protestant, but Maggie insisted that it worked no matter what one's faith.

Witch hunting was always a mixed bag of what would and wouldn't work. So, they had to be prepared to try it all. Richie hitched his crossbow up onto his shoulder when he heard Maggie start muttering to herself for a little bit.

"Okay. I'm ready. Teeth and Eyes?" She pauses only for a breath. "Go."

The silent night filled with loud screams only for a few minutes before all was quiet again. The soft chirping of the crickets filled the silence again, wind blowing the trees softly as a black Hyundai drove off down the street into the night.

Notes for the Chapter:

- Sad Eddie
- Toziers kill a whole coven
- Richie remembers being tortured with a hot fire poker

3. Small Victories

Notes for the Chapter:

A huge thank you to [Oldguybones](#) for betaing for me!
Thank you so much, babe!

Art at the end is by the amazing [Xan!!!](#)

“In Puritan theology, a person recorded a covenant with the Devil by signing, or making their mark, in the Devil's book ‘with pen and ink’ or with blood. Only with such signing, according to the beliefs of the time, did a person actually become a witch and gain demonic powers, such as appearing in spectral form to do harm to another. ”



Eddie snorted as he continued to flip through the old book, the pages crinkly, yellow with age and smelled like dust. He tapped the side of his foot against the leg of the chair as he continued to read, the soft sounds of Mike brewing in the background relaxing him.

“Read something interesting?”

Eddie shrugged, placing the book down on the table as he turned to watch Mike carefully wrap a large slab of dripping honeycomb into a cheesecloth and then set it in a clay bowl. Mike twirled the top of cheesecloth closed tight, then picked it up and started to squeeze the honeycomb inside.

Bright amber honey oozed through the fabric and into the bowl below in gooey ribbons.

“I just can’t believe people really think that’s what we do. That we are one with the Devil and when we sign his ‘book’ we are granted

these amazing powers.” Eddie huffed, turning to look at the old picture of people in line to sign.

He admired the way Mike’s arms flexed as he started to squeeze harder and twist, honey gushing through the more pressure he applied.

“Well,” Mike grunted, wringing the crushed comb empty before setting it off to the side and moving to grab a towel to wipe his sticky hands. “People tend to fear what they don’t understand, like back then anyone who didn’t follow Christian law were viewed as odd and different. People didn’t understand why they didn’t think like everyone else.”

Eddie pursed his lips. “But the devil? Really? Even in fucking blood magic, you rarely go that far.”

Both him and Mike made the same disgusted face at the idea of blood magic.

“Anything different is evil and who’s the main evil guy?” Mike asked as he grabbed a silver spoon and sifted through the honey, checking for any pieces that might have gotten in. When he found nothing, he tapped the spoon against the bowl and set it to the side. “Did you see what they think we wear?”

Eddie laughed as he picked up another book, this one far more modern and flipped to the page he had seen earlier. There was a picture of an apparently popular movie called The Wizard of Oz, where a haggard looking woman with green skin wore long black robes and a tall pointed black hat. She held an old straw broom in her hand as she pointed menacingly.

“Why the green skin?”

Mike gave a small shrug.

“I’m not sure, some say that our kind actually took potions that had the after effect of turning their skin green tinged? But really, I think it’s something the movies made up, cause I don’t really remember reading any potions that cause that.” Mike moves over to one of the

large pots, steam rising from the boiling water inside as he took a pair of tongs and reached in to pull out the seven mason jars that were inside. Carefully, he set them down on the table one by one to let them cool.

They had to wait for the jars to become room temperature, so Mike came to sit next to Eddie at the table and let out a soft weary sigh. Eddie frowned and turned to his friend, raising a questioning eyebrow.

“What’s wrong?”

Mike was quiet for a moment, his full lips growing pinched and that made Eddie worry. When Mike was upset it usually meant something big had happened.

“An entire coven in Bangor was obliterated a few weeks back.” Mike started softly and Eddie felt his heart dropped into his stomach. “Their entire coven meeting place was lit up in flames, the place was so badly burnt they could barely tell that there were bodies inside.”

“Are you serious?” Eddie whispered and felt that awful spike of fear when Mike nodded slowly. “How far is Bangor from us?”

Mike shook his head with a sigh. “Not far. My family sold potions and herbs to them, so it’s not too much of a hike.”

“Shit.” Eddie cursed, hating the way he felt his body start to shake a little. “Your family-?”

“Nah,” Mike shook his head again. “My parents know how to keep their sales looking normal. Plus, my family went paperless before it was a thing, so unless those sick bastards can hack an email and figure out that under our actual farm, we sell supplies, I doubt they’ll find us.”

Eddie bit his lip and nodded slowly. The Hanlon’s had always been very smart, making sure to keep the cover of their potions and supplies business under the cover of their farming business. But Eddie worried for his best friend, their farm was at least ten miles out from the nearest home and even further from the town, if they got in

trouble no one would be able to help. He wrung his hands together tightly, jerking a little when Mike covered them with his own wide hand and gave them a gentle squeeze.

“It’ll will be okay, Eddie. I promise.”

The smile his friend gave him was soft and made Eddie’s nerves ease just a little bit.

Hunters were something rare, but a witch always had to be careful who they trusted just in case. Eddie had only heard of a few cases where a witch had gone outside their coven and trusted in a human enough with their secret. In fact, the last case had been back when Eddie was small, it had happened in a state over and word traveled quickly through covens.

At least it did.

Something weird had happened around the time the Hanlon’s had been exiled and suddenly the Derry, Maine coven closed its doors and all communication with their brothers and sisters on the outside.

It was three days later Frank Kaspbrak had been murdered.

Eddie took a deep breath in through his nose, the fuzzy dark memories of the past swimming in his head and he quickly tried to shut them out. He pressed his lips together tightly and tried to think of anything else to take his mind off the past. He eyed the jars and turned the hand under Mike’s up, so their palms laid against each other’s.

“Are the jars cool now?”

Mike smiled and nodded, giving Eddie’s hand another small squeeze before getting up and walking back over to the jars. Quickly he flipped them over, so they were open side up and waved Eddie over.

“Alright, let’s do your honey jar first.”

Eddie eyed the seven jars. “You have orders for seven honey jars? That’s a lot.”

Mike laughed and shook his head. "No, three honey jars, two cough syrups and two actual just regular grade A Hanlon Farm honey."

Eddie grinned, moving to lean his elbows on the table so he could prop his chin in his hands as he watched his friend start to work.

Mike Hanlon was, like his mom before him, the best potions maker and spell caster. Honestly, the coven lost a huge asset when they turned the Hanlon's out and Eddie never understood what could have been so bad that a coven would overlook such raw talent in Mike. He watched as Mike moved around easily, not even needing a book as he moved to the large apothecary cabinet and pulling out ingredients by memory.

"Alright," Mike drawled slowly, bringing his ingredients back to the table and setting them neatly up. "We have cinnamon for prosperity, basil for improvement, chamomile for luck and wisdom and lavender to keep a calm spirit."

Mike moved over to get a small piece of parchment and a pen, handing them to Eddie as he went to go get the right color of candle.

Eddie took the paper and sighed, quickly writing his wish on the small slip before folding it up. He held it in his hands tightly, closing his eyes as he tried to focus his magic and good energy into the paper.

The ink on the paper grew warm in his hands.

I want to do better in school.

When Mike returned with a tall, thin yellow candle Eddie took a deep breath.

"And yellow for...?"

Eddie scowled. "Seriously? You're testing me?"

"Do you know it?"

Eddie pursed his lips, but when Mike seemed to really want to know he let out a loud sigh. "Yellow, for intelligence, confidence and

learning. There, did I pass your test, Mr. Hanlon?"

Mike beamed brightly and nodded, placing the candle by one of the jars before picking it up. He waited for Eddie to wrap the paper in the red binding thread that had been laid out and then held the jar out to Eddie. Eddie took it, slipping the small piece of paper into the jar as he continued to focus his energies on it. Mike handed him the dried herbs one at a time, Eddie sprinkling them over the paper until it was completely covered and they both took a moment to focus on it.

Please let me do well in school.

Please let Eddie do well in his schooling.

They both took a deep breath, letting it out before Mike scooted the clay bowl filled with honey towards Eddie. Eddie picked up the silver spoon and started to heap globs of honey over the crushed herbs and paper, waiting until he heard Mike clear his throat before the both started to chant.

"As this honey is sweet to me so will knowledge drawn be.

As this honey is sweet to me so will knowledge drawn be.

As this honey is sweet to me so will knowledge drawn be. "

Eddie filled it to the top, leaning down to breathe a breath of his own into the spell before quickly capping it and putting the lid over it. Once more he focused everything he could onto the small piece of paper, his fingers starting to tingle before he pulled away.

"How long before you have to go home?" Mike asked and Eddie quickly looked over at the clock that hung about the Hanlon's kitchen sink.

"I have a few more hours before my mom said I had to be home."

"Want to light it here?"

Eddie nodded and they both mounted the yellow candle on top of his jar, Mike getting a box of matches and handing them to Eddie. He struck the match, the smell of fire instant as he carefully lit the fresh wick. Eddie waved the match out and let a loud sigh out as Mike laughed.

"God, I hope this works. History is murdering me."

"What about Richie tutoring you?"

Mike sighed when Eddie glanced off to the side, frown on his face as he tried not to seem really childish about how him and Richie had been lately.

"I'm not saying what he did was right, Eddie, but not hanging out with the group at all sucks. We all miss you."

Eddie tried not to feel happy that he was missed by the group, the idea that the other kids liked him as much as he liked them made his heart warm.

Eddie gave a small shrug and sighed. "I know, I'm sorry. I don't know why it's taking me so much to get over it. I mean, it happens. Things come up."

It was weird. It wasn't like he had a crush on Richie, so why did that whole thing feel like he had been rejected? Probably because their group, including Mike, had sleepovers and hangouts all the time, so missing one wasn't too much of a big deal, but Eddie had never had that. Even sleepovers and hangouts with Mike were rare, his Mother using the excuse that the Hanlon Farm was too far for a boy to bike all the time.

Mike bumped their shoulders together softly. "It's okay to be upset. I mean, you aren't allowed out that much and you had to ask your mom to go. Especially on a Friday, which I'm sure your mom loved."

Eddie groaned and nodded. "Do you know how much stuff I had to

promise her just so she would agree I could go? Like I'm talking herb drying and trips to my aunt's place with her."

"Oh geeze." Mike's face twisted like he had eaten a lemon and Eddie had to agree with that. "That's crazy."

"Yeah."

They watched the candles flame flicker, yellow wax starting to melt and drip down the sides, droplets pooling down onto the golden lid of the can. Eddie always found it relaxing to watch candles burn, there was something soft and warm about how the little flame danced.

"Are you ever going to talk to him?"

Eddie blinked, being brought back out of his daze by Mike's voice and he turned to look at his friend. "Huh?"

"Richie."

"Oh." Eddie presses his lips into a tight line. "I talk to him...he's my tutor after all."

Mike gave him a disapproving look. "You know what I mean."

Eddie groaned and leaned back against the chair, letting his body go loose and floppy. He stared up at the ceiling as he went back over his tutoring sessions with Richie this past week. How he had barely said more than he had to, eating in the library so he wouldn't have to face Richie at lunch and not picking up the phone when it rang at home.

Only problem with isolating himself meant that he had no one to back him up when Henry came around.

Eddie played with the ring around his finger. "Yeah, I'll talk to him. I mean, he's apologized and everything for it and tried to explain. I should just forgive him...I miss you guys too."

Mike grinned. "Good, I hate being in one sided relationships. Besides, Samhain is coming up, you don't want an ill relationship to start the new zodiac wheel, do you?"

Eddie laughed, reaching out to push at Mike and grinned when his friend laughed as well.

“You sound like High Priest Bowers right then.”

Mike pulled a face. “Oh, come on. That’s just mean! I’m at least better looking than him.”

“I guess.” Eddie lied, laughing louder when Mike looked so offended.

“How dare you. I’ve been told that I am the most handsome boy in all Derry.”

“By who?”

“My mom.”

Both boys roared with laughter again, their laughs echoing across the stone floor cheerily. Mike moved to start making the other jars, gathering ingredients and such, laying each piece out by a specific jar before he started to work.

“You going to the Halloween dance thing the school is doing?”

“Probably not.” Eddie sighed, knowing that since it was a holiday for them his mother would die before letting him go out and have fun. “Every Samhain we clean and purify the house, go to my dad’s grave and try to talk to him, he never answers, then eat plain chicken and carrots for dinner. It sucks, but my mom would go insane if there was a change.”

“You know that it’s not actually on Samhain, right?” Mike asked, writing down something on a piece of paper and folding it up. “It’s like the weekend before it.”

“Like that will matter to her.” Eddie grumbled.

“But I want someone to take me.” Mike whined dramatically. “Come on, just tell her you’re coming to my house to study up on potions and then we can head out together.”

Eddie raised an eyebrow. “Oh? So, we can go to the dance and I can

be murdered by Stan-hates Eddie's guts -Uris?"

"What?" Mike looked over at Eddie in shock. "Stan doesn't hate you! Why would you think that?"

"Oh," Eddie drawled, throwing up his hands. "I don't know. Maybe because he glares at me every chance he gets. Especially when you're around and you hug me or sit down next to me. He hates me cause I think he thinks we are secretly like together or something."

"No, offense," Mike laughed. "But ew."

"Wow. Thanks." Eddie replied and he watched Mike shake his head as he bound the paper with string and said a small quick prayer before tossing it in one of the jars.

"I'm sure he doesn't hate you." Mike replied softly. "Stan isn't like that. He's actually really nice once you get to know him, plus he doesn't like me like that."

Eddie had never rolled his eyes harder, grinning when he heard Mike make an offense sound and he shook his head.

"Whatever you want to think, Mike."

There was a flurry of movement before a tiny little blue blur zoomed into the room, taking a lap around the ceiling before moving to rest on Mike's shoulder.

"Ah, there you are, Blue."

Blue was Mike's familiar, she often took the form of a small blue finch, her little dark blue wings fluffing up so her bright yellow beak could clean under them. Mike had gotten her back when he turned thirteen, a weird choice considering he had feared birds since he was young, but now Eddie knew Mike couldn't live without Blue.

She sang happily when Mike reached up to rub his finger over her little head, fluffing up the feathers around her neck.

"Who's my favorite girl?"

Blue chirped happily.

Eddie smiled. "So, what's the jar your making now for?"

"Well..."

"So, King Henry VIII was succeeded by...?"

Eddie bit his lip as he tried to remember the facts. King Henry has been the guy who really wanted a boy and had decided to go against the church and divorce his first wife because she only gave him a daughter...Mary.

Eddie tapped the eraser of his pencil against his textbook, his leg started to jiggle a little.

"Ummm...he had one son, who didn't live very long after he was crowned and that was...."

He remembered Richie's smile. Teeth full of color.

"We have Kings names, Eds."

"Edward! Edward VI!"

Richie's grin was slow, but he nodded and pushed the small Hersey kiss across the table towards Eddie.

"Good job. I thought I had you there for a second for sure."

Eddie happily took the small candy, unwrapping it and popping it into his mouth, the smooth sweetness a perfect reward. He tried not to notice Richie watching him, taking an interest in the globe on the other side of the room as he chewed. When he swallowed, the awkward silence that had been plaguing their study sessions had

resumed and Eddie scratched at the side of his face as he tried to take Mike's advice.

"So--"

"Yeah?"

Eddie blinked, taken off guard by how quickly Richie had responded. "What?"

They stared at each other for a bit, both looking like they wanted to say something, but didn't want to interrupt the other. Finally, Richie waved his hand at Eddie, something that was supposed to look carefree, but ended up looking jerky and nervous.

"You go, sorry."

"Uh," Eddie had to remember what he wanted to say and nodded when he thought he had it. "So, I was going to say...I think we should talk about...stuff."

"Stuff?"

Eddie glanced up when he heard Richie's chair squeak, the boy leaning his tall lanky body back against the small desk chair. Richie looked hesitant, like he wasn't sure if he wanted to do this when for the past two weeks, he had been telling Eddie how sorry he had been.

"Yeah." Eddie answered. "About why we've been weird lately."

"You're the only one who's been weird."

What? "Excuse me?"

Eddie watched as Richie sighed, rolling his shoulders a little before moving so he could rest his bony elbows on the table and his hands clasped in front of him.

"I've been saying I'm sorry for like the past week, but you've just been ignoring me. Look, I'm sorry I canceled the thing when you were really looking forward to it, but something really big came up and I had to go. Honestly, if you really wanna talk about it, fine. I

think you're kinda making this bigger than it needs to be."

Eddie refused to acknowledge the hurt that bubbled up in his chest at how flippantly Richie talked about canceling the plans. Like he hadn't been begging Eddie to come before and now it was as if all this was because Eddie was dramatic or something. Eddie swallowed down the first insult his brain could think of, knowing that getting mad wasn't going to help the situation any and he took a breath.

"I understand it took me a little bit to sort out what I was feeling, but I don't think I was making it into a bigger deal."

At Richie's soft sigh Eddie wanted nothing more than to throw his huge world history book at his face.

"Eddie, it's not just the not forgiving me right away thing." Richie then frowned, moving to tap his pointer finger against the table softly. "You also refused to hang with us at all after that. Like, I tried to make it up to you. I planned things for all of us to do, but you never came."

Eddie ran hot with sudden anger. "What do you mean refused? I told Mike that my mom said I couldn't go."

Richie's face turned irritated then, mouth twisting into a displeased scowl as the tapping on the table grew faster and louder. "Four times in a row?"

Eddie looked around the room as if he was trying to find someone to ask if they could believe Richie was pulling this.

"Um? Yeah?" Eddie bit out, not able to contain the harsh sounding tone. "I told you before, my mom likes me where she can see me. Do you know how much I had to beg to let her say yes to that one time?"

"Is that supposed to make me feel guilty?" Richie asked sharply, stopping his tapping so he could sit up straight. "Cause I have to say, I'm tired of feeling guilty over this."

"What the fuck is wrong with you?" Eddie hissed.

"You, Eddie!" Richie yelled, his voice booming in the small room and

Eddie jerked back against his seat at it. "After that you don't come hang out during free period anymore, you don't sit with us at lunch and you even book it home before any of us can even find you."

"It's one thing to ignore me." Richie growled with a scowl. "It's another to ignore all my friends."

"I wasn't- I wasn't trying to ignore you guys! Yeah, I didn't want to eat lunch with you because of this for a bit," Eddie saw how Richie flinched at that, but so fucking what. If he wanted to do this, then fine Eddie would! "I'm sorry if my feelings were hurt, I have never really been to a friend's house for the night except Mike and I was looking forward to it!"

Eddie voice started to grow in volume, ignoring the way Richie glanced at the door nervously as he continued to let out everything he had been feeling at the other boy.

"And my mother really did say I couldn't go those times, but thanks for assuming I was just being a monumental asshole instead!" He slapped his palm flat down on the table, the sound loud and harsh as his hand radiated with a sharp sting.

Someone in the hall banged their locker closed.

Richie stared at him wide eyed, mouth hanging open slightly before he closed it with an audible click and glanced away. Eddie moved his still stinging hand to his lap, clasping them together tightly as they sat in silence. He wanted to shout some more, his blood still pumping, but he kept his mouth shut because nothing he had to say would only make himself feel better and only for a second.

"I'm sorry."

Eddie's ears were playing tricks on him. "What?"

Richie sighed, reaching up to run a hand through those insane dark curls, the motion making them even worse as Richie slumped a little in his chair.

"I said I was sorry. I didn't mean- ugh." Eddie watched rainbow teeth bite that full bottom lip and he tried to focus on Richie's words

instead. "I just-I felt bad, but when I thought you were ignoring all of us that kind of rubbed me the wrong way. They like you, I mean I do too, but they didn't do anything wrong, so I didn't want them being punished because I did something stupid."

Richie started to pick at a hangnail on his thumb, looking like a kicked puppy and Eddie sighed.

"I'm not ignoring them." Eddie chewed on the inside of his cheek and decided to be honest. "I was ignoring you, but I know that wasn't the best way to show how hurt I was. So, I'm sorry about that."

Richie's lips twitched in the slightest hint of a smile. "It's okay. I was a dick."

Eddie chuckled softly at that, Richie's grin growing wider at the sound and he sat up a little more. Eddie was surprised that just like that, things seemed to slide back into place, Richie once again being the loud obnoxious guy he was and Eddie feeling like he could be at ease around him.

"So, what was so important that you had to go with your parents?" Eddie asked, slowly packing up his books because they only had eight minutes left of their session. "I thought Bev said they were going on a business trip?"

Richie went weirdly still for a moment, face blank, before he gave an effortless shrug and laughed lowly. "My parents were going to visit my aunt while on their work trip. I haven't seen her in a while and I really wanted to."

"Oh." Now Eddie felt bad. Family was important. "Well, I'm glad you got to see her."

There was that weird stillness again, he looked a little nauseous before Richie let out a small breath and nodded. "Yeah. Me too."

Eddie finished packing up his bag, slinging it across his chest with a soft sigh before giving Richie a small smile. "See ya?"

Richie nodded. "Yeah, see yo-Wait!"

Eddie hadn't even moved so he just tensed every muscle in his body to look like he was frozen in place. He raised an eyebrow when Richie stood up, looking a little bit nervous as he started wiping his hands on his pants.

"Are ummm...are you planning on going to the Halloween dance?"

"Oh." Eddie pursed his lips a little. "I mean, I don't know. My mom might not let me because it's so close to..."

Richie's eyebrows furrowed as Eddie trailed off. "Close to what?"

Saying Samhain would be weird, and explanations would be needed.

"Halloween." Eddie finished lamely, looking down at the thin carpeted floor so he could roll his eyes at himself. He looked back up when he heard Richie move closer, small confused smile on his lips.

"I mean, yeah? That's why they call it a Halloween dance."

"Yeah, no." Eddie shook his head and made an awkward hand gesture. "She's just weird about Halloween."

Richie blinked and then took a step back. "Oh, I get it."

Eddie bit his lip. "You do?"

"Yeah." Richie gave a small shrug. "Your mom doesn't like Halloween cause it's the evil holiday and all the junk, right? You Catholic?"

Eddie burst out laughing.

"Sorry!" He gasped, holding his stomach as he tried to get the laughter under control, but it was hard because that idea was so ridiculous. "I'm sorry I don't mean to laugh!"

Eddie was glad when he finally calmed down to a few uncontrollable giggles and looked up, Richie didn't seem offended or upset. He looked happy, like Eddie laughing made his day.

"So, that's a no? On being Catholic and the dance."

Eddie let out one last chuckle. "Yeah, unfortunately. To the dance, not to not being Catholic."

Richie laughed softly at that and had started to reach out to fix the collar of Eddie's shirt-

Both boys jumped when the room's door pushed open roughly, Bill Denbrough pushing through as he blew a piece of auburn hair out of his eyes. Eddie immediately turned towards Bill smiling back when the guy smiled at him.

"Hey, Eddie." Bill then glanced over Eddie's shoulder to Richie and jerked his head out to the hall. "You ready, Richie? If we're going to make it to my house and then to the movies on time, we g-g-gotta get going."

Eddie thought Bill's stutter was cute and didn't understand why people made fun of it. So, it sometimes took a little longer for him to get what he wanted to say out, but according to Bill it was a lot better than what it had been when he was younger. He heard Richie sigh and move over grab his things, Bill glancing back over at him with another smile.

"Hey, Mike said he asked you about the Ha-Ha-Halloween dance. If you want, I can give you a ride to Mike's, I'm getting ready there with Ben."

"Oh," Eddie shifted his bag to his other shoulder, hating that he had to explain this again. "I don't know-"

"Say it's like a study thing." Bill interrupted, charming smile on his face. "Your mom can't say no if it's to do with your grades."

"Um," Eddie frowned, not wanting to disappoint Bill, but also not knowing how to tell him that talking to his mom about going out was like talking to a prison warden. "I mean...maybe? I'll see what I can-"

Richie roughly bumped his shoulder as he moved past Eddie, causing Eddie to stumble a little bit and glare, even when offered up a half-hearted apology.

Richie's face was no longer happy. Instead he looked mad. "Come on,

Bill. Let's go."

He didn't even wait for Bill to reply, just walked out leaving Eddie and Bill to stare after him questioningly. Bill frowned a little, but then shook his head as he turned back to Eddie.

"W-w-what's his deal?"

Eddie gave a helpless shrug, trying not to focus on how the irritation he'd seen in Richie's eyes made him feel queasy. "I don't know."

Bill hummed in thought before giving his own shrug. "Whatever. I'll ask him later. Think about coming to the dance, Okay? Let me know."

And like that Bill was gone too before Eddie could say anything in reply. Eddie gave a wave to the now closed door, even though no one could see it and sighed when he glanced at the clock on the wall.

Time to go back home.

Eddie could barely focus during class that Friday night. Picking a spot on the wall just behind Lord Bowers shoulder so he could space out while still looking like he was paying attention.

He kept going over Richie's reaction yesterday and the conversation he'd had with Mike that night.

"Did you say yes to going to the dance with Bill?"

Eddie frowned as he held the phone closer to himself, moving out onto the back porch so he could talk without his mother's listening ears. When he was outside, he sat down on the steps and coiled the cord around his hand.

"Sorry, had to get outside and no?"

He heard Mike shift. "Well, Richie says you did."

"What?" Eddie hissed, trying to think back on when that even happened. "Is he talking about in the tutor room?"

"I don't know." Eddie could tell Mike was shrugging, could see it clearly with a small confused frown on his friend's lips. "He just said you said no to him, but then agreed when Bill asked."

"Oh my god." Eddie groaned loudly, letting his head lull back as he took a deep breath to calm the irritation that was growing. "I didn't say yes. I said maybe."

Mike was quiet, which was weird because normally Mike was quick to be on his side and reassure him that the other person was being silly.

"Did you say no to Richie?"

Eddie bit the inside of his cheek and let out a huff. "I mean, yeah I did, but--"

"But you said maybe to Bill...in front of Richie."

The sudden embarrassment and shame that filled him made Eddie's irritation spike and he growled into the phone. "I didn't mean to say that!"

There was silence on the other end and Eddie immediately felt bad for snapping at his best friend when he was just trying to point something out. Eddie took a small calming breath, sighing over the line when he heard Mike clear his throat but remain quiet.

"I'm sorry. I didn't mean to snap at you."

Mike gave a small hum.

"I just..."

"Like Bill?"

"What? No!" Eddie cringed at his loud voice, glancing back at the back

foot to make sure his mother wasn't there watching. When the screen door was vacant of anyone, he turned back around and cupped the phone close to his mouth so he could speak quietly. "What the hell are you talking about?"

"You don't like Bill?"

"I-Not like that!" Eddie hissed loudly through his teeth. "I mean, he's real nice and cute, but I just like him as a person. He's got like...this vibe that I admire."

He heard Mike him softly again.

"Does everyone think I like him?" Eddie tried to keep his voice calm, but he heard it crack at the end because his panic was starting to rise. "Does everyone in the group think I have a crush on Bill?!"

"Oh god." Mike sighed. "Eddie, that's not what I meant when I asked you that."

"But do they?!"

"No," Mike said, then paused and backtracked. "I mean, Richie kind of does, but that's not the whole group."

"Ugh. Seriously?" Eddie placed his hand over his eyes, pressing his fingers into his eyes with just enough pressure to hurt slightly. After a moment he pulled it away with a sigh. "I don't like Bill. I don't like Bill romantically."

"Okay."

"And I didn't mean to hurt Richie's feelings if I did, Bill kind of pushed his way into that and I just agreed, but I can see how that would look to Richie." Eddie let the phone cord fall so he could twirl it around his fingers in a worried gesture. "What should I do?"

"Well," Mike started in a slow drawl. "You could apologize."

"Yeah." Eddie nodded. "Yeah, I can do that. I'll call him before class tonight."

"Yuck." Mike replies and they both laughed softly. "Good luck, Eddie. I'll

talk to you later.”

“As always.”

Eddie had tried calling Richie’s phone a couple of times before he and his mother had to leave for classes, but each time he just got Richie’s voicemail. He knew Richie had his number in his phone and never went anywhere without it, but he tried not to think that he was being ignored.

Richie wouldn’t ignore him after he got so upset at Eddie ignoring him...right?

“And may the light being shine for all of us.”

Eddie jumped when everyone started standing up to talk to each other, surprised that he had spaced out through the whole lesson. Eddie quickly bowed his head to offer his prayers to the light being, unsure as to why he felt uneasy the second he thought its name. When he finished, he stood when his mother did, shifting a little uncomfortably when he noticed Lord Bowers coming over to talk to him and his mother.

“Hello, Lady Sonia.”

Eddie watched as the high priest reached out to touch his mother’s hand. Eddie had always felt weird around Lord Bowers, not for anything the man had done to him, but because of the weird arrangement the coven had come up with after Eddie’s dad had died.

Frank Kaspbrak has been the High Priest of the coven before his death and because it happened so suddenly, the coven was forced to make a quick choice on who would proceed him. Eddie’s mother had stayed High Priestess, but because she was focused on raising Eddie, she had let Lord Bower’s take over most of running the coven.

Lord Bowers smiled at his mother and turned his gaze onto Eddie, the smile becoming wider so that his blue eyes crinkled a little.

“Hello, Edward.”

Eddie gave a small nod. “Hello, Lord Bowers.”

"I hear you're doing well in your new school." The man's voice was soft, but it still sent an uncomfortable shiver down Eddie's spine because he knew how harsh that voice could get. "I hope Henry is being nice and showing you the ropes."

Eddie glanced over at the boy in question, hanging over with Patrick Hockstetter in the corner of the building, watching Eddie and whispering.

"Mmhmm."

It was all Eddie could give to that, not wanting to think about the terrors Henry liked to inflict on him daily. He let out a slow breath when Lord Bowers reached forward to lay a hand on his shoulder and squeezed, trying not to wince when the pressure was just a bit much.

"Your mother tells me that your counselor has started talking to you about colleges."

Eddie glanced at his mom; a small huff of annoyance was all she gave to show that she didn't like the idea. Eddie hasn't even said that he wanted to go, just that Ms. Brill had brought it up and if he had any plans for it.

"Oh, umm. Well, I mean I hadn't really thought about it, but--"

The hand on his shoulder squeezed tighter and he actually did wince a little this time, but Lord Bowers did not seem to notice or care. Eddie tried to angle his body so that the grip would losses, but Lord Bowers hung on while he kept that smile on his face.

"Now, I know college sounds big and exciting. Trust me, I went to see what it was all about for a few years, but you are so talented with your magic and we would hate to lose you here in Derry."

You had no problem kicking Mike out and he's the best among everyone.

Eddie kept that thought to himself, irritated by this whole conversation but also terrified enough to keep quiet. Instead he uttered a soft 'yes, sir' and felt he could finally breathe again when the man's hand left his shoulder.

“That’s good. Just let me know, Edward, if you ever have any questions. I’d love to help.”

On the ride home, Eddie couldn’t shake the slimy unease that sat heavily in his stomach, watching the other cars zoom by as his mother drove. When they got to their house, Eddie didn’t even bother with their pre-bedtime routine, telling his mom that he wasn’t feeling well and quickly heading up to his room.

He quickly stripped and put on his pajamas, not caring if his mom got upset for not taking his nightly shower and slipped under the covers after turning off the lights. It wasn’t even nine yet, but Eddie just wanted to be alone and lay in the dark.

He’d messed up with Richie.

Even Mike wasn’t pleased with him.

He wanted to disappear.

He hated it here.

Eddie pulled the comforter up over his head and started to cry, his sobs becoming louder as he thought about his life, so he tried to quiet them with his pillow. Only when he started to calm down did he pull his face away from his now soaked pillow, wiping at his face and trying to breathe through his stuffed-up nose.

He glanced over at the alarm clock on his nightstand, sighing when it read ten, but his mother hadn’t come to complain to him about missing stuff. She was probably already in bed, so Eddie sat up, eyes feeling heavy and tired from crying, and started to get out of bed to get a glass of water when he heard something.

Ping.

Eddie stopped.

He listened.

Ping.

Eddie whipped his head to the side to look at his window, frowning when the noise happens again from something small hitting it.

“What the hell?”

He moved over to the window, trying to look out but it was too dark to see so he unpatched the lock and pushed it up. Eddie poked his head out to look around, everything still a little too dark, when he was struck on the forehead. Eddie let out a yelp and stumbled back into his room, the harsh sting of being hit made him hiss as he rubbed at it.

“Eddie?”

Eddie froze, knowing that voice, before running back over to his window and looking out again. Now that his eyes had time to adjust, he could see the faint outline of Richie’s jacket and he didn’t let himself question why he suddenly felt like his heart was in his throat.

“What the hell are you doing?” He hissed down at the other teen, glancing back at his door to make sure his mother hadn’t gotten up. When he heard no sounds he turned back around, only to find Richie gone.

“Wha- Richie?”

“What?”

For the second time that night Eddie yelped, and he glared harshly at the boy who was now up in their crab apple tree and climbing closer to Eddie’s window. The cold October breeze blew through Richie’s curls and Eddie wondered for a second if the other was cold.

“What the fuck are you doing?”

“I’m trying to get close enough, so we don’t have to whisper yell at each other.”

Eddie let out an irritated noise through his nose and went to go get his comforter, throwing it around him so he wouldn’t freeze while monkey boy figured out what he was doing. He stood at the window and watched Richie, fingers clenching in the soft fabric of his

comforter at the few times the other boy almost slipped. When Richie seemed to settle on a solid branch closest to Eddie's window, they were about three feet from each other.

"Richie, what the hell is—"

"You called me."

Eddie blinked at the soft words, surprised by them and how small Richie seemed as he awkwardly played with his hands.

"Uhh, yeah I did."

"You never call me."

Eddie wanted to argue that that wasn't true, but he knew that it was. All communication was done either at school, through Mike or when the other losers called his house. He had called Bill and Ben exactly once, but other than that he rarely called anyone but Mike.

"Oh, well. I wanted to call to say that I'm sorry." Eddie took a deep breath and let it out slowly, looking over at Richie. "I shouldn't have said no to you and maybe to Bill. I just got...I don't know."

Richie still looked little, face a little sad as he gave a small shrug.

"I get it. We all try to please the person we like."

Oh

My

God

Eddie let the comforter drop from his shoulders, hands coming up

and then down quickly onto the windowsill harshly, making a loud noise that startled Richie.

“What the hell, Ed-“

“I don’t like Bill!”

His yell was a bit too loud and both boys froze as they listened for any sound of Eddie’s mom moving. After two minutes, when she didn’t come charging through the door, Eddie turned back to Richie with a scowl.

“I don’t like Bill and I would appreciate it if you would stop telling everyone that.”

Richie’s eyes were wide in surprise and he gestured helplessly with his only free hand that wasn’t clinging to the tree.

“I didn’t tell anyone!”

“You told Mike!”

“Okay, well I told Mike, but I didn’t tell anyone else!”

Eddie growled and Richie tried to scoot further out of the tree branch so he could get closer to Eddie. He waited with a scowl as the other got himself situated, crossing his arms over his chest because it was cold without his comforter, but he wouldn’t stop to reach down and get it.

He wanted Richie to know he was mad.

“Okay,” Richie started hesitantly, shifting his weight delicately so that he wouldn’t fall. “I’m sorry I told Mike that, but what else was I supposed to think? You hang on that guys every word.”

“First off,” Eddie started, hands going to rest on his hips. “Even if I did like Bill, which I don’t, then it wouldn’t be your business to start saying that to people. Who I like is nobody’s business but my own and that person, okay?”

Richie was quiet for a second. “So, you do like someone.”

“I’m going to push you out of that fucking tree.”

He watched as Richie tried to scoot back carefully so Eddie wouldn’t be able to reach him, not that Eddie would have actually tried to push him. He may be irritated, but he didn’t want to hurt Richie. When Richie stopped moving again, they just stared at each other for a bit until Richie glanced away and bit his bottom lip.

“So...we’re both sorry.”

Eddie was pretty sure when two friends said sorry to each other, it wasn’t supposed to still feel awkward and stilted. He didn’t like the weird scared feeling that roared to life in his gut when he thought that maybe him and Richie weren’t friends like he thought.

He gave a curt nod. “Yep. Both sorry.”

“Cool, cool, cool.”

They were quiet again, Richie refusing to look at Eddie as Eddie tried not to look away from Richie in this heavy weird tension. Finally, Richie started to climb back down the tree, quiet as ever and Eddie watched him go with his heart in his throat.

Wait.

Don’t go.

He kept himself still as Richie jumped back down to the ground, touching the tree trunk gently with his hand, looking like he wanted to say something before sighing and jogging away into the night.

Come back!

Eddie closed the window tightly, locking it back up as tears started to fall from his eyes again. His nose was still slightly stuffy, and his forehead was sore from whatever Richie had thrown at him as he climbed into bed. He could feel the tears run down and drip into his ears as he laid on his back staring at the ceiling.

He hated this week.

The next week passed slowly, Eddie helping his mother get ready for the winter in the garden by covering all the plants that couldn't be brought inside and other chores. Mike and Bill had tried calling, but he just didn't feel up to talking to anyone except the few times he had thought of calling Richie.

School was awkward. None of them really knowing how to talk to him since he had been dodging them last week. Richie talked to him, but it was odd and Eddie wanted to yell every time Richie opened his mouth because it wasn't right.

He was back to being the weird kid with no real friends.

Eddie went with his mother wherever she wanted, did all the activities she asked him to do and was the all-around perfect child that she had been lamenting that he had changed from. He started to feel numb again, like how he had before he had started school, when he could only see Mike every other weekend.

He listened as his mother ranted about the family down the street who played their music too loud.

He listened to her talk on and on about how he was such a good boy.

He listened and listened and listened until her voice became white static, her mouth moving like she was on the TV and he had turned the volume down.

Was this what his life was?

What Lord Bowers wanted? For Eddie to sit here in this house with his mother and grow old?

Never leave.

Always trapped.

Eddie closed the thick leather binding of the book Mike had loaned him a few weeks back and turned to look up at the TV as his mom laughed.

No.

“Mama, I want to go to the Halloween dance at school.”

The TV was immediately silenced, and he knew he had her attention, glancing over to see her looking at him intensely.

“Excuse me?”

He hated when she made him repeat himself, knowing that she knew what he had said, but he took a deep breath as he turned on the couch to face her.

“I want-“ He stopped when he realized that he made it sound like he was asking. “I’m going to the Halloween dance this coming Friday.”

He watched as his mother sat up out of her reclined position in her chair, her eyes boring into him and mouth looking pinched.

“You absolutely are not. Samhain is coming up and I need you here to help me with the preparations.”

Eddie took a steadying breath, thinking through what he wanted to say before he opened his mouth. “Samhain isn’t until Tuesday. The dance is this Friday. I’ll have plenty of time to help you with everything we need in order to prepare for Samhain.”

He could tell his tone was not appreciated when she started trying to get out of her chair, moving to stand over him as if he was six years old and that would frighten him still. Her cheeks were red already and Eddie mentally got ready for the fight.

“Do you know how disrespectful that is? Samhain is a time for reflection and change! It is an important time and you know this, Eddie!” She waved her arms around, the metal of her bracelets jingling. “You think going to a dance is considered reflecting?”

“No.” Eddie said softly, and he watched his mother’s face change, the small barely there smile thinking she had won that easily. “But I’m still going.”

It was the worst fight they had ever had.

Even compared to the fight they’d had when Eddie had been seven and didn’t want to go to class because he didn’t feel like it. Sonia Kaspbrak pulled out all the stops, anger, tears, punishment and even threats to call Lord Bowers. Eddie kept his head high through it all, refusing to back down against her as he watched her sob into the phone as she made the call.

When Lord Bowers came to their house the next afternoon, Eddie was polite even when he felt like Lord Bowers sat too close to him, but he stayed firm on what he wanted.

“I’m going to the dance.” He stated plainly. “What I’m asking isn’t unreasonable.”

He was surprised when Lord Bowers agreed with him but tried not to show it as Lord Bowers took his hysterical mother into the next room to speak with her. They spoke for a long time, Eddie barely able to hear anything besides his name and a few weird mentions of the light being. When they both entered the room again, his mother was calm but refused to look at him as Lord Bowers smiled that uneasy smile again.

They let him know that he could go.

As soon as Lord Bowers left, Eddie watched his mother silently go upstairs and shut her door before taking off to the garage to grab his bike.

He had never peddled to Hanlon Farms faster.

Mike was surprised to see him, in the middle of doing some of his schoolwork when Eddie burst into his room gasping, dripping sweat and with a large grin on his face.

“Eddie?”

“I can go!” He shouted, gasping out a laugh when Mr. Chips barked at his volume. “I can go to the dance because I refused to take their shit!”

Mike looked so confused and worried. “What is happening?”

“I stood up to my mom and it was fucking amazing!” He shouted again and threw his sweaty self-down onto the soft rug on Mike’s floor, beaming proudly up at the ceiling.

Mike went to get them celebratory sodas and Eddie spent the whole rest of his Wednesday night telling Mike about his victory. When they got around to the topic of the dance, Mike asked what he was going to be since it was a costumed dance.

Eddie glanced over at the book he had been reading back when they made the honey jars and smiled.

“I think I know exactly what I want to go as.”

It wasn’t hard to find the pieces he needed for his costume, stashing them away at Mike’s so he could get ready there like they had wanted. Bill came over, a horrifying rubber doll mask pull over his face while he wore blue overalls. He tried to explain his costume to Eddie, but all Eddie could get was killer baby doll.

Mike came out dressed in his fine black suit that Jessica had made for him, a small stuffed pug and slipped on a pair of shades. Bill thought it was amazing, Eddie didn’t get the reference.

Eddie slipped into the tight black jeans Bill had let him borrow, rolling the cuffs only once before buttoning up the black dress shirt he’d found in his father’s clothes. He let Mike cover his face in green face paint and then placed the large brimmed pointed hat on top of his head.

He was ready.

Eddie had never been to a school dance, which made sense because he had never been to an actual school before, but as he walked into the gym with his wicked witch costume on his jaw dropped.

Purple and orange lights were strung up everywhere, casting a pretty glow throughout the dimly lit gym. The walls were decorated with zombies, ghosts, aliens and Eddie had to grin when he saw a large black outline of a witch riding her broom. The middle of the gym was filled with all kinds of characters, some monsters and some Eddie knew were some kind of pop culture thing, but he didn't know.

Bill said it was lame, but Eddie thought it was beautiful.

He felt Mike nudge his shoulder and he smiled at his friend to let him know he was okay, holding his makeshift broom tighter as Bill and them moved further into the gym.

They found Bev first, but it was amazing anyone could tell it was her. She was dressed in a brown ill-fitting suit, pillow shoved down the front of her shirt, so it looked like she had a gut and a hairy rubber werewolf mask over her head with a pair of old glasses glued to the eyes. When she turned to see them, she yelled something muffled and then pulled off her mask, red curls a mess and a large grin on her face.

“Eddie! You're here!”

Eddie let out a small surprised laugh when she rushed over to hug him, holding on a little tighter and longer than normal. He hugged her back just as tight, glad she understood that this was his apology for the past few weeks. When she finally pulled away, her smile was softer but no less happy and she glanced back to where Eddie saw Stan, Richie and Ben standing before going to say hello to Mike and Bill with their own hugs.

Ben was dressed amazingly. Dark suit with a long black cape that went down to his heels. A white half mask was secured over his face, hair gelled back, and Eddie faintly remembered that look from something.

A book? Phantom something.

Stan wore only a white t-shirt with khaki slacks, the words This is my costume written across it in dark letters. He had a pair of weird springy antennas attached to a headband that pushed back his hair and Eddie didn't even want to guess how that costume creation went down.

Richie...

Dear lord. Richie's costume almost made Eddie swallow his tongue.

The other's long thin legs were wrapped in a kind of dark hosiery that looked like a net, red women's heels on his feet that made his legs look shapely and made him now at least a foot taller than Eddie. Richie was wearing what had to be a woman's costume, the nurses uniform barely making it past his ass while the top part of the 'coat' was open as a simple stethoscope hung around his neck.

The small nurses hat sat precariously on the top of those wild black curls and Eddie felt weird looking at Richie. Weird and jittery. Like he had magic jumping beans in his stomach and it got worse when Richie finally looked over at him.

Shock moved onto Richie's face, eyes widening behind his glasses and jaw going slack as he stared over at Eddie. Eddie gave a small wave, the jumping beam feeling becoming something closer to nausea when Richie's expression changed for the quickest second to something dark.

Eddie had the strangest urge to run.

But soon the expression was gone, and the three boys were making their way up to the group, Ben giving Eddie a happy pat on the back and Stan at least acknowledging his presence with a nod before moving over to Mike. When Ben moved away to talk to Bill and Bev, it left only Richie and Eddie, facing each other with unsure smiles on their faces.

"You came to the dance."

"Yeah, well." Eddie gave a halfhearted shrug, glad for the green paint

all over his face because suddenly his cheeks were burning. “I got asked by two guys, so I figured I should at least make an appearance.”

Richie’s unsure smile melted to reveal that rainbow grin that Eddie’s heart jumped at the sight of and he clasped his hands in front of him suddenly nervous. He took a sharp breath in through his nose when Richie reached out to gently grab the brim of Eddie’s hat between his fingers and gave a soft laugh.

“A witch?” Richie asked softly. “I guess you do kind of fit Elphaba.”

Eddie laughed. “I have no idea what you are talking about.”



Richie let go of the edge of Eddie's hat, stepping a little bit closer with a soft expression that made Eddie feel warm but also like he was a bottle of soda that had been shaken too much. Richie bit his lip, blue and purple bands showing with his teeth before he reached down to take one of Eddie's hands.

"Come on and dance with me."

"Can you even dance in those shoes?"

Richie grinned as he took an impressive step back in those heels, pulling Eddie closer to him and gave them both a spin just to show off.

"I'll have you know, we nurses take our job very seriously. We are prepared for anything, even dancing with cute witches in heels." Richie gave them another spin, which knocked Eddie's hat off and they both laughed.

"I'm pretty sure last I checked, that wasn't the uniform for nurses."

"You got me." Richie grinned, the song changing to another fast-paced song, but he didn't let go of Eddie's hands. Instead Richie just kept waving their arms around in a weird imitation of what Eddie had only seen in swing dancing. "I'm actually a nurse by day and a sexy vigilante by night. Fighting evil by moonlight, winning love by daylight and all that jazz."

Eddie laughed, cheeks starting to ache from smiling too much. "That's a lot of work for one person."

"Gotta feed my kids."

"You have kids?"

"Well, a snake."

The song changed to a slow one and Richie suddenly seemed

extremely unsure of himself, Eddie glancing around to see couples pairing up to dance closer to one another. He turned to look back at his friend when he felt Richie drop one of his hands, starting to mutter softly that if Eddie didn't feel comfortable, they could go get some drinks. Eddie gulped and decided to be brave, his heart hammering in chest wildly as he lifted one of his hands to rest on Richie's shoulder while the other that was still holding Richie's hand lifted into the traditional waltz position.

Richie looked scared to death until Eddie gave him a nudge.

Richie's hand moved to Eddie's waist and through all the nerves, Eddie had to laugh at himself because why did he take the female position when he only knew how to lead?

"Tell me about your snake."

Richie opened his mouth, but Eddie was quicker.

"And I don't mean your dick."

4. The Night Knows My Fears

“Goodnight stars, goodnight air. Goodnight noises everywhere.”

-Goodnight Moon by Margaret Wise Brown

His own screaming filled his ears, the blinding pain he felt as the hot metal touched his skin made it almost impossible to think of anything else. Miss Delilah’s eyes were wide and frantic as she pulled out the burning poker, a chunk of his burnt flesh coming with it.

“May it cause you pain,” Miss. Delilah hissed. “And burn for life. Every night you’ll see my face as I twist the knife.”

He gasped and choked on his tears, as she took a handful of his dark curls and cut them off, placing them in a bowl before she set the poker back in the roaring fire. He closed his eyes, whimpering for his mommy softly, his mind delirious with pain when he tried to move away as she leaned in

close to his face.

“Wha-what did I do?” He whispered.

“Witch hunter!” She spat. “All you do is kill! Monster! Monster! MONSTER!”

Richie jerked awake, his sleep shirt plastered to his body from being soaked with sweat and he quickly scrambled to grab his glasses off his nightstand. He shoved them onto his face as he turned to look around his room, breath coming quickly as his heart felt it was about to beat out of his chest.

Nothing was in his room.

It was the same as it always was, even if the shadows seemed more ominous at that very moment. Richie flopped back down on his mattress with a sigh, hand drifting down to touch the ugly burn mark on his side. It ached, but at least it was calming down from the blinding pain that woke him.

She was dead, so why wasn't the curse?

“Fucking witches.” He muttered, moving to reach for his phone and scowled when the time read four am. He let out a long tired sigh, the images of Delilah starting to fade as his brain started forgetting what it had made him dream.

His body still felt shaken and Richie held his phone above him, unlocking it and squinting a little when the bright light shone in his face. He let his eyes adjust before looking through his apps to find something to calm him down and settle his mind.

He could just *hear* Stan bitching in his mind how the light from a screen actually does the opposite of helping a person fall asleep. Just for that he opened his pictures and found the first picture of Stan, standing next to Mike and Bev in front of a street named ‘Gaylord’, and flicked the picture Stan’s forehead.

“That’s what you get for imparting knowledge onto me.” He whispered and grinned as he started to flip through his photos. He stopped when he came to a photo of Eddie, Bill and Ben. Richie had surprised them while they were teaching Eddie how to play Magic: The Gathering, all of them looking up with different faces of surprise. Eddie’s face made Richie’s lips pull into a small happy grin, his eyes looking over the boy’s wide eyes as he remembered how red Eddie’s cheek had been when Richie had hugged him goodbye that night.

Ever since the Halloween dance, Eddie and him had started to move perfectly together. There were no more big misunderstandings or hurt feelings, in fact, Richie felt like aside from Mike, Eddie tended to gravitate more towards him than anyone else in the group. Something that made Richie feel like he was on top of the world as well as scared beyond all belief.

He’d had crushes before. Sure.

He’d gotten to third base with Gina Riggaletto during that last summer.

But for some crazy reason, sitting on the couch next to Eddie with their arms touching was more electrifying than getting his hand in Gina’s tight pants.

He knew what this was.

The way he would get louder, more vulgar, try to joke constantly. Anything to get Eddie to look at him, to smile at him.

Richie gave a soft sigh as he flipped through the rest of his pictures, stopping at another one that was just of Eddie. Richie had asked him to smile, which then had Eddie sticking his tongue out while flipping Richie a rather magnificent bird.

“Fuck.” Richie whispered into the silent dark of his room, his heart feeling like someone was squeezing it the more he looked at Eddie’s face.

Maybe this was a little more than a crush.

He let his phone go black, Eddie’s picture disappearing as his whole

room plunged back into darkness. The images from his nightmare still swam in his mind, but the image of Eddie's face along with his other friends made him feel happy and safe.

Ms. Delilah could rot in hell.

Richie placed his phone back on his nightstand and rolled back over, falling back asleep almost immediately.

How fast the Halloween decorations around town had come down to be replaced with a generic fall look was honestly a little sad. Thanksgiving wasn't really anything special besides a four day weekend and getting stuff his face with his mom's cooking.

The woman excelled at four main things.

The study of witch lore and extermination.

Not putting up with his shit.

Eating all the oreos before he even knew they were in the house.

And whipping up some gourmet shit for meals.

Margaret Gabrielle Tozier was the real modern woman.

Richie yawned as he rubbed at his eyes from under his glasses, blocking out Bill and Stan's argument on if a hawk could fly off with a toddler, and leaned over so he could rest his head on Bev's shoulder. She was talking to Ben about something to do with their English class so he let his gaze travel to Eddie across the table who was reading over one of the comics Bill had brought for him to borrow.

He was scrunching up his nose at a certain scene and Richie couldn't even try to hide his smile at how cute it was.

"Which one you reading?"

Eddie glanced up before he turned the comic around so Richie could look.

“Bill is letting me read some of his Batman comics.” Eddie replied and Richie chuckled, glad Bill had decided to give Eddie pre-52. “I like him, but I think my favorite character so far is Dick.”

Richie glanced up with a grin, loving the way Eddie’s cheeks went red at the name, and he had so many jokes stored for that but he gave Eddie a break. “Of course you do. He’s like the hottest, coolest thing in DC, just like me.”

He gave a wink. “We even have the same name.”

His heart soared when Eddie snorted, a large smile on his face as he rolled his eyes. “You want me to start calling you Dick?”

Richie let an exaggerated purr roll off his tongue. “Oh baby, you know it.”

Eddie laughed and shook his head, but Richie noticed that his cheeks only grew more red as he pulled the comic back towards him. The group continued to hang out at the picnic table until Eddie started packing up, which everyone now knew meant his curfew was approaching.

Five was such a dumb curfew.

“Hey, what are you all doing over the long weekend?” Richie heard Ben ask as they walked back to Richie’s truck, the cold November wind blowing right through the denim jacket he had put on earlier.

“You mean besides stuffing our faces on turkey day?” Richie asked and then shrugged. “Nothing really.”

Everyone answered around the same, then all turned to look at Eddie when they realized he hadn’t spoken up. Eddie looked surprised at the sudden attention and gave a shrug himself, pulling his thick sheepskin coat around him tighter.

“Nothing big? I mean, we got something small to do on the thirtieth, but other than that nothing.”

It was Stan, surprisingly, who asked the question they were all thinking. “Wait, so you don’t have Thanksgiving?”

“Oh.” Eddie shook his head, stopping when he noticed everyone was looking at him. “Not really. I know what it is, but me and my mom have never really celebrated it. She’s also not really big on cooking a bunch of stuff only for the two of us.”

“So, you’ve never had stuffing?” Bev questioned and Eddie shook his head. “What about mashed potatoes?”

“I’ve had those.” Eddie replied, tone a little defensive. “I was homeschooled, not locked away from civilization.”

Even through his shock, Richie felt a sharp laugh rip its way out of his mouth at how offended Eddie looked and he moved over to wrap his arm around Eddie’s shoulder.

Eddie didn’t push him off. Amazing.

“I have a brilliant idea.” He stated, letting his posh British accent color the words. He’d just thought it up, right there that second when he turned his head just right and could smell the soft scent of sandalwood in Eddie’s hair and clothes. “You should come to Thanksgiving at my place.”

Richie caught the look Bev and Stan sent his way, looks that said they knew what he was up to and it was extremely obvious.

Richie flipped them a subtle bird and grinned wide when Eddie turned his head to look at him, their faces so damn close and Richie had to pull back otherwise he’d do something nuts. Eddie looked unsure, which made Richie’s stomach sink a little.

Had this actually been a bad idea? Too forward? But Eddie’s next question reassured him.

“Are you sure that’s okay? Don’t you have to ask your parents about that first?”

Eddie’s cute worried face could make Richie do absolutely anything and he shook his head quickly, ignoring everyone else’s eye roll because they knew how his mom felt about last minute plans. He reached over to pat Eddie on the chest through his thick coat and gave the smaller boy a wink. “Don’t you worry about that, my Eds.

My parents love having people over. They'll be over the moon knowing you're coming."

Eddie still seemed hesitant, but he slowly nodded and smiled.

"Yeah, that would be really fun actually. Okay, I'll ask my mom tonight."

"Sweet."

"Absolutely not."

"Mom!" Richie cried, moving around the island counter so he could stand next to her while she snapped green beans for dinner. "Come on! It's not like I'm inviting a ton of people! He's just one guy! And he's small so he won't take up much room at the table!"

"Lower your voice, Richie." She replied easily, taking the freshly snapped beans and putting them in a strainer for later. She wiped her hands on her apron before giving him a look with her patented eyebrow raise. "It is literally two days before Thanksgiving and now you're asking to add another person to the guest list."

"Just one!"

"Richie..." Maggie groaned, closing her eyes and reaching up to pinch the bridge of her nose which always meant he was swimming towards dangerous waters. "Your grandparents are going to be here and you know how they aren't all there anymore. We are just lucky

the home takes their talk of witches as crazy old folks being weird.”

It had been a whole thing putting his Nana and Papa Tozier in a nursing home, for one because his Papa could still physically do almost everything with the strength of a bull. The other was because everyone and been worried about Nana’s dementia which led her to rattle on about witches to literally anyone.

It was no big deal if a normal person heard her, but if the wrong person happened to be listening...

“Eddie wouldn’t know anything about that.” Richie pleaded. “He’d just think they were crazy, which they kind of are. Normal people either don’t believe in witches or think they are some hippy dippy weirdos.”

Both of them knew that wasn’t true in the slightest. Witches were deadly creatures who had signed their lives away in exchange for deadly power. The scar on Richie’s side still burned with that power even after its caster was long gone.

“Richie...”

“We even have room! Our table seats six and he would be the sixth and you’re always complaining about too much leftovers so having another mouth would help with that.” He locked eyes with her, feeling like he was ten years old again asking for a 3DS. He could easily tell the thoughts that were running through her mind, the need to continue saying no so she didn’t appear lax up against her desire to give him what he wanted because she loved him. So he decided to push it a little more. “Please mom...it’s really important.”

Bingo.

Richie watched as his mom’s resolve started to crumble and when she stood back up straight he could tell he’d won when she sighed.

“Let me talk to your dad about it.”

“Talk to me about what?”

Both Richie and his mom jumped at the sound of his dad’s voice both

looking over at the stool against the counter that had been empty when they started the conversation. There sat his dad, calmly drinking a cup of coffee like being able to sneak up on two trained hunters was no big deal.

Wentworth Tozier was the type of man Richie hoped to someday be.

Got his dream girl in college and they were still crazy in love, juggled his dentist practice while saving people from unknown danger and could shoot a crossbow like no other.

He loved his dad so much sometimes it was embarrassing.

“Richie wants to invite his friend to Thanksgiving.” His mom replied with a sigh and Richie frowned at the tone of her voice.

“Gee, Mags. You’re really selling it.”

“Don’t call me that.”

“Alright. Simmer down both of you.” Went took a gulp of his coffee before setting it down and turning to look at Richie. “Who is the lucky person you are wanting to invite to our thanksgiving literally two days before and throwing a wrench into your mom’s planning?”

He just *knew* his mom was tossing him a gloating look but he would deal with that later. Now he had to focus on the tricky game of dealing with his dad because while Maggie was strict and mostly no nonsense when it was important to him she usually let it happen. Went spoiled Richie like he was the prince of England, but he was the real tough nut to crack when it came to big decisions.

“Eddie.” Richie started plainly and Went tilted his head with a curious look on his face and suddenly Richie didn’t want this conversation to continue.

A curious Tozier was always a bad idea.

“Eddie?” His dad drawled out slow, as if testing the name like he had never heard it before. “The new boy? Homeschooled like Mikey but now able to go to public school? The kid with dark brown hair and eyes? And a laugh like, oh, Mags, how did he put it last week?”

Richie felt his cheeks go hot when his mom laughed and moved to continue cooking.

“He said Eddie’s laugh is like sunshine.”

“Sunshine!” His dad snapped his fingers together as if Maggie had reminded him of the secret to the universe. “That’s right. Sunshine laugh Eddie. This wouldn’t happen to be the boy you’re constantly on the phone with after school would it?”

“That-that has nothing to do with this.” Richie gulped, suddenly feeling like maybe this was a bad plan and he needed out. If he invited Eddie over and they had caught on to his feelings for the guy they would be *insufferable* , but he’d already told Eddie he could come.

Canceling was bad juju in his and Eddie’s history.

“Look,” Richie held up his hands, as if his parents were those raptors in Jurassic World and he was Chris Pratt. “He’s never celebrated Thanksgiving and was interested in it so I said he could come and check it out. Can we not be weird here?”

His parents exchanged a look he didn’t like.

“I get to greet him as sunshine laugh Eddie.”

“Mom, no!”

“We got to make a good impression, Mags. Our boy is getting on in years, don’t wanna ruin his chances and have him become a spinster.”

“You two are the worst and I renounce the Tozier name. I’m an orphan now.”

“We are empty nesters now, Mags. Time to do everything we ever wanted without the burden of children.”

“We can finally move to Ireland!”

Richie stomped out of the kitchen with a frustrated groan as his

parents laughter followed him up the stairs and into his room.

Thursday came quicker than Richie had expected and soon he found himself outside the Kaspbrak residence, reaching out to ring the doorbell. It was weird being back at this house during the daytime and not trying to climb up the tree off to the side of it. Richie let his eyes wander around their porch, small empty pots that obviously had plants in them before fall came and tied to the front door knob was a bunch of strands of twine tied to small little bells. Richie frowned a little as he tried to remember why the weird little thing looked so familiar, but he quickly stood up straight when he heard the door start to open.

There in front of him stood a woman in curlers and thick glasses, an unhappy frown on her face as she sized Richie up with her cold eyes while still in what looked like her pajamas. Richie gulped, the first time ever really being nervous in front of someone's parent and he gave a small unsure wave which the woman did not return.

"Mrs. K, I assume?"

"My last name is Kaspbrak. Either say the name or don't say it at all."

Wow. What a peach.

"Sure thing, Mrs. K." Richie tried to ignore how the woman seemed to try and fill the entire doorway with her body, as if Richie were some kind of bacteria she was trying to keep out. "Is Eddie ready?"

"I am!" He heard a voice shout from back in the house and soon Mrs. Kaspbrak was being gently nudged aside, Eddie's beautiful face popping out with a smile. "Hey, Richie."

"Hey, cutie."

The noise Mrs. Kaspbrak made at that sounded almost like some kind of bull that had seen red and Richie kind of saw where Eddie got it. Expect on Eddie it was cute and kind of sexy, on Mrs. Kaspbrak...it made Richie want to recoil in disgust.

"Okay, mama! I'm going."

Richie watched as Eddie leaned up to kiss his mom's patchy pale cheek quickly, moving to walk out the door before she grabbed onto his wrist.

Richie grit his teeth when he noticed it was not gentle either.

"Eddie-bear," Mrs. Kaspbrak whined and the time was so different to how she greeted Richie it almost made his head spin. "Remember the rules."

"Yes, mama." Eddie sighed, glancing at Richie as his cheeks went red. "Take my medicine before dinner and be back home by nine."

Eddie made a move to pull away but she pulled him back again with a force that made Richie honestly mad. Who the fuck tugged their sixteen year old son around like he's a toddler?

"And?" Mrs. Kaspbrak asked and Eddie sighed softly.

"And I'll make sure to call you when I get there and when I'm about to leave."

Finally the bitch seemed satisfied and let go of Eddie's arm and Richie had to stop himself from reaching for Eddie, comfort him because honest to god what the fuck was that? Eddie gave a small nod and waved to his mom before making a beeline for Richie's truck. Richie gave a quick half-assed salute to Mrs. Kaspbrak before jogging over to meet Eddie who had already climbed into the passenger side.

Richie closed his side's door and they both sat quietly there for a second.

"Your mom seems..."

"Please, Richie." He glanced over to see Eddie looking almost upset and he wanted so badly to reach over and touch Eddie's hand. Pat his back. Anything to let the guy know that it was okay. "I know she's not the greatest, but she's my mom and she's all I have."

You have me!

Richie ignored that whiny hurt little voice inside his head and nodded. "I was just going to say, I think she's totally into me. Should I go for it?"

Richie started the truck and laughed obnoxiously as Eddie reached over to shove at his arm. The tension was broken then, and the short ten minute drive seemed far too short to Richie.

He was going to throw something at his parents.

Really he was.

As soon as Eddie had walked through the door, Went and Maggie would switch between being the perfect hosts to grilling Eddie about everything in his life. His dad would ask Eddie what his life goals were while his mom served Eddie an appetizer, then his mom would ask how Eddie was adjusting and doing in school while his dad refilled Eddie's drink.

Richie was about to strangle both of them, barely able to say a decent hello when his dad brought back his grandparents. It didn't help that Eddie readily answered anything they asked, with a small polite smile on his face like this was amusing to him. Luckily, early dinner was ready before his parents could dig into Eddie Kaspbrak's life too much and Richie made sure to sit Eddie next to himself at the large rectangle table.

Things had quieted down, his parents asking real innocent questions and steering conversation on to topics that Richie's grandparents could follow along with. It was honestly actually enjoyable, his dad cracking joke while everyone rolled their eyes or laughed, talking about day to day things...

Until his dad brought up the wishbone.

“Who wants to break the wishbone?” His dad laughed happily, tapping a fork against his empty plate.

Richie nudged Eddie, trying time get him to do it since Eddie seemed new to everything Thanksgiving when his grandmother spoke up.

“Don’t play with bird bones, Wentworth! That’s a witches game.”

Everyone grew silent, his mom and dad staring at his grandmother with a look of terrified worry and Richie licked his lips as he glanced at Eddie. The look on the boy’s face wasn’t what he had expected.

Confusion? Awkwardness? Amusement?

None of those. Instead he saw the quickly glimpse of fear on Eddie’s face and Richie frowned, worried that maybe Eddie was one of the few who believed in real witches.

“Helen,” His mother laughed, a sound that held no realism of amusement. “Are you feeling alright? Forgive her, Eddie. She tends to have boughts of-“

“It’s not true.”

The table was silent again, this time all eyes trained on Eddie who only watched Richie’s grandmother intently. Richie glanced back and forth between the two, neither looking very amused by the topic and Richie had a sinking feeling in his stomach.

If grandma Tozier didn’t like you, you were pretty much not welcome in the family.

“Eddie, what are you-“

“It’s not true.” Those large brown eyes turned to him and Richie suddenly felt trapped between two great forces. “It’s not. It’s a common misconception that witches use animal bones.”

Eddie looked so serious and determined to make Richie see, then he seemed to realize something, his eyes going wide and cheeks turning

red. Eddie turned to look down at his plate, picking up his fork to push some peas around. "I read up on them for a project back when I was homeschooled. It was really interesting."

"Your readings were wrong then." Grandma Helen replied, surprisingly no bite in her words. "I've seen them use bones."

"Mom!" Richie's dad tried to interject, but she kept going as if she hadn't heard.

"There was a witch that used to live in the house a few doors down from me when I was younger." She continued. "She would constantly throw chicken or duck bones into a large pot in her backyard, along with herbs and such."

Richie felt like he was going to have an aneurysm from this, and he prayed that Eddie would just stop talking about it. Just dismiss it as an old woman being superstitious and rambling, but when Eddie shook his head Richie wanted to cry.

"That sounds like bone stock making." The table was quiet, no one really sure what to do as Eddie confidently continued his explanation. "It's really nutritious for you and easy to make. My mom and me make it a lot when we have roasted chicken. You basically boil the bones for a long time, then season and store it."

Grandma Helen looked flabbergasted and Richie was surprised when his mom actually spoke up next, in Eddie's favor. "I have to say that is true, Helen. That is how bone broth is made and we shouldn't just go around accusing people of being witches."

The look she sent Grandma Helen would have made Richie run for the hills, but Grandma Tozier was braver than all of them and she turned to Eddie again. "You've read about witches, boy?"

That was when Eddie seemed to get flustered, glancing down at his plate as his once sure voice started to come out as a quiet stutter. "Yes, Ma'am."

There was a long silence, then Grandma Helen's wrinkled face broke into a large smile, her cloudy blue eyes crinkling with excitement.

“Oh I like this boy. Richard, you should make sure to keep him around.”

After that, Richie couldn't relax.

He stayed alert through dessert, feeling ready to jump in if his grandma or Eddie decided they needed to have another weird information battle. When his parents finally excused them, his mom saying that Richie should show Eddie his room which Richie *gladly* took the excuse to leave the table and get Eddie away from his grandparents.

It wasn't until they were on the landing upstairs, far away from senile hearing ears, that he turned to Eddie with a confused look, trying to keep his voice calm. “What the hell was all that about?”

Eddie looked confused, brow furrowed and perfect small lips pursed, and it was just unfair how god damn cute this boy was. “What?”

“The whole-“ Richie raised his hands in the air and moved them around spastically as if that would clue Eddie into what he meant. “The witch stuff.”

Eddie's confusion morphed into a look of irritation. Richie could easily see Eddie was going on the defensive when he pulled his wrist out of Richie's hand and folded his arms across his chest. “Because it wasn't true. That was an untrue stereotype and honestly makes witches just look like animal killing devil worshipers when they aren't.”

Richie frowned at how heated Eddie seemed to get at this, wondering why he was so intent on making sure everyone knew what he had to say on the matter. Then, it hit Richie like a sack of bricks and he suddenly got that sickly nauseous feeling one got when someone thought badly of you.

Eddie probably only knew about witches from the Wiccans. He only knew the word applied to that group who only seemed to want to cure things with their herbs and be balanced with the universe or something. Oh god, Eddie thought his family was looking down on a group of people who were harmless and just practicing what they

believed. He could feel his cheeks burn with shame and he wanted to explain so bad that the Wiccan weren't the problem, that there were real witches out there. Witches who kidnapped small children and tortured them all because of who their family was.

But he couldn't say that. He couldn't say any of that, even when Eddie looked so disappointed in him.

So, instead he took a deep breath and nodded.

"You're right. I'm sorry. My grandma is starting to lose her marbles, so some of the stuff she says doesn't make a whole lot of sense." He licked his lips and gave Eddie the best sad dog look he could over the rim of his glasses. "She's also from an older era where anyone weird or different are automatically bad. Not that I'm saying that excuses it, I'm just explaining."

Richie held his breath as Eddie seemed to think this over, frown still on his lips before he purses them and nods. "Yeah, okay. I get that."

"Okay." Richie gave a hesitant smile. "We good?"

Eddie returned the smile and Richie felt like he could breathe again. "Yeah, We're good, Trashmouth."

"Mmm, love it when you talk down to me."

Eddie laughed and gave him a shove. "Just show me your room."

"So eager, Eds! My fam is right down stairs!"

Richie had never been embarrassed to let his friends into his room, honestly loving to show off his stuff. His guitars, his computer, his comics, everything he took pride in was in his room, but the second Eddie stepped over the threshold Richie was suddenly aware of everything wrong with his room.

It was messy.

There was a million mugs of water on his nightstand.

His dirty clothes littered one half of his room.

His book case was stacked with all kinds of junk.

His bed looked like a velociraptor had Irish step danced in it.

As Eddie looked around, Richie tried to nonchalantly clean at least a little bit but all of that was forgotten when Eddie let out a gasp and rushed over to Karen's terrarium. At first, Richie worried that Eddie didn't like snakes and he was upset, but the large smile on his face as he tried to look into the terrarium told otherwise and Richie was probably on his way to love right there.

"Oh man!" Eddie moved up and down on the balls of his feet excitedly. "It's a California Kingsnake!"

Richie beamed and he quickly made his way over to the two most beautiful creatures in the world, glancing down to see Karen poking her head out to inspect the new arrival. "You know your snakes! Most people just either say 'Wow a white and black snake' or just 'ew'."

Eddie shook his head, at what part of Richie's statement he wasn't sure, and continued to look happily down as Karen slithered out from her water dish. Richie was surprised she was even coming out, normally she only came out for him and sometimes not even then. He smiled when her small tongue flicked out, smelling Eddie in the air in question.

"We used to have a snake." Eddie started softly and Richie turned in time to see the wistful look on Eddie's face as he watched Karen. "A California Kingsnake too actually."

"Yeah?" Richie asked as he sat down in his desk chair, watching Eddie intently because how could he not? "I didn't think they were kept as pets that often."

Eddie gave a small shake of his head. "He was my dad's actually, had had him since he was about seventeen. He was such a nice snake, he'd always like lay on my back because I was always warm. He always hung around my dad's neck when my dad would do his work..."

Eddie's mood suddenly seemed to take a nose dive, one finger tracing

the glass as Karen followed it with her nose.

“My mom said he died pretty quickly after my dad was...” Eddie cut himself off, seeming to rethink his words and then let out a soft sigh. “After my dad died.”

Richie was quiet, letting Eddie and Karen have an oddly tender moment as she tried to raise herself high enough to get over the lip of the cage, but she kept slipping down.

“Do you want to hold her?”

Eddie’s head snapped towards him and Richie could *see* the excitement bubbling up out of the other boy just from his expression. “Are you sure? I know snakes can be particular to who holds them. Cornelius only let my dad, and sometimes me, hold him.”

“Damn. Cornelius?”

Eddie grinned and shrugged. “I’m not the one who picked the name.”

Richie let out a soft chuckle. “Sure, okay. But yeah I’m sure. Normally she doesn’t care for anyone really, but she seems oddly active and ready to meet you.”

The brilliant grin that spread across Eddie’s face made Richie feel light headed and he had to focus on getting Karen ready so he wouldn’t just kiss the boy into oblivion. Richie made sure they had both washed their hands, snake care was important and Eddie was more than willing. He was careful as he reached into her tank, surprised by how quickly she moved into his hand, her cool smooth body wrapping around his wrist as he lifted her out. He held her out to Eddie and without any hesitation or even a smell test, she slid onto Eddie’s wrist with ease and wrapped around his wrist tightly.

“Hello, pretty girl.” Eddie said softly, letting her bump his finger with her nose before he pet her and Richie felt like a proud Dad whose kid was being amazing. “I really like your stripes.”

“I found her if you can believe it.”

“You *found* her?” Eddie looked up confused, that perfect pouty frown

on his face again. "What do you mean? Like, in the wild?"

"Yeah, it was a couple years back." Richie started, knowing it didn't sound great that he had brought a wild animal home and kept her as a pet. That was like rule numero uno. "I think I was around eight and we had just moved here to Derry, so I was hiking around in the woods. I was kicking around some leaves when I started hearing this soft hiss and rattling."

"Oh god." Eddie whispered, smiling again though when Karen made her way up his arm and curled around his neck to bump her nose against his cheek.

God damn, Karen. Richie thought. *Keep it in your pants.*

"Yeah, I totally thought she was a rattlesnake until I saw her coloring. She stopped when she got a good look at me and then...she followed me home."

"What?!"

Richie laughed at the look of absolute disbelief on Eddie's face, Karen curling around his neck and resting her head on Eddie's shoulder. She looked like a fancy small scarf that did nothing.

"I know!" Richie laughed. "But I can't make this shit up! She followed me all through the woods, stopping when I did and going when I went. When I came home with her I think my mom about blew a gasket. We tried taking her back but she always followed me back."

"That's insane." Eddie huffed.

"Yeah, but it's funny cause as soon as she had her cage and a warm place to live with food, she barely wanted anything to do with me." Richie stuck his tongue out at Karen who didn't even bother looking at him. "She only wanted me for shelter."

Eddie laughed and they spent the rest of their time up in Richie's room, looking over the games Richie had or just talking and laughing as Karen stayed around Eddie's neck. Time went by far too fast and when Eddie glanced at the time on Richie's computer he sighed and they both had to *pry* Karen from Eddie's neck before they went

downstairs to get their stuff together to take Eddie home. Eddie said his goodbyes to Richie's family, Richie tensed as his grandmother shook Eddie's hand and told him to come visit anytime.

The drive home was filled with Richie's music and small talk. It was warm, happy and comfortable, feelings that Richie had never had all together with someone he liked. Eddie was a friend and so much more.

God, did he love him?

No, it was too soon for that and it was probably his dumb hormonal teenage brain telling him this was the real thing. Both laughed at something on the radio and Richie wished this car ride could last forever, which it obviously couldn't since Eddie only lived about eight blocks away.

When they pulled up to the Kaspbrak house, everything was dark aside from the faint blue glow coming from the front room window. The cheery mood seemed to drain quickly from the car and Eddie glanced over at his house with a sigh. "She's probably watching a rerun of jeopardy while she waits. Going to ask me five million questions about tonight, acting like she's actually interested instead of just making sure I didn't have too much fun."

"Eds..." Richie whispered, hating how disappointed Eddie looked to be going back home and he wished he could just call home and say he's bringing Eddie back. They had a guest room, or Eddie could even share a room with Richie. Hell, Karen loved him more than Richie already so that had to be a sign. "We could drive around the block again if you want..."

Eddie gave him a small smile but shook his head. "No, delaying it would just be worse."

He turned fully to face Richie after he had unbuckled his seatbelt and Richie wanted to die when the first thought his brain had was *kiss him*.

"I had a lot of fun, please thank your parents again for me, okay?" Richie couldn't really tell cause of the dark, but he thought he saw

Eddie's cheeks turn red. "I really had a great time and I really just...um...yeah it was great and fun and I--"

Richie didn't even think as he leaned in.

Eddie's lips were soft and he could feel the way Eddie's words died against Richie's mouth as he leaned in closer to the smaller boy. Richie's heart was in his throat when he realized Eddie wasn't responding and he pulled away slowly, fear rising up to the point where he thought he was going to throw up right there.

Eddie looked shocked, not disgusted at least, but almost scared.

"Fuck." Richie whispered harshly. "Eddie, I'm sorry. I was- I thought you maybe liked me back and I thought this was a good time, but now I'm seeing that I really messed up."

"You...you like me? Like that?"

Richie frowned. "Wasn't it obvious?"

Eddie quickly shook his head and glanced out the windshield window. "You flirt with everyone...you kissed Bev last week like it was nothing."

"Oh." Richie had never thought about his behavior with the Losers as anything but platonic, which he could now see as his downfall because Eddie was a loser, but also a love interest. "I mean, yeah, but you were different- *are* different."

Eddie was quiet as he continued to look out the window and Richie was ready to tell Eddie to please forget about this. They could go back to just being friends and he'd just slowly crush his feelings for Eddie until they were nothing but dust and he could just blow them away. He opened his mouth ready to say it when suddenly Eddie lunges across the gear shift at him and locked him a painful teeth clacking kiss.

After ten full minutes of figuring out the right angle, his braces cutting the inside of Eddie's lips a few times and both getting slight hard ons, he had to watch the most amazing boy he'd ever kissed get out of his car.

He watched as Eddie walked up the driveway, unlock the door and turn to wave at him with a large beautiful smile before slipping in and shutting the door behind him. Richie sat in his truck for a good twenty minutes after Eddie went inside, head leaned back against the headrest before he let out a loud happy scream and beat his hands against the steering wheel.

“Ah fuck!” Richie cried with a laugh. “Fuck yeah!”

Richie barely registered the drive home, waving to his parents when he got home as he took the stairs to his room two at a time. He decided to go to bed early because he honestly couldn't focus on anything besides the memory of how Eddie's lips had felt against his, how he sounded when Richie ran his tongue over his bottom lip and how red Eddie's cheeks had been when he finally got out of the car.

The losers were hanging out tomorrow and that was still too long of a wait to see Eddie again.